

Message

From: Hassell, Emily [hassell.emily@epa.gov]
Sent: 4/9/2018 8:55:36 PM
To: AO OPA OMR CLIPS [AO_OPA_OMR_CLIPS@epa.gov]
Subject: News Clips - 9 April 2018

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Reuters - Trump administration mulls stiffer rules for imported cars

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Daily Caller

<http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/09/liberal-writers-media-narrative-scott-pruitt/>

Liberal Writers Try To Change The Media Narrative On EPA's Scott Pruitt

By Michael Bastasch, 4/9/18, 10:45 AM

With President Donald Trump publicly backing Scott Pruitt amid increased calls for his head, liberal outlets have changed their focus from Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrator's scandals to his "lack of regulatory rollbacks."

Pruitt's biggest deregulatory actions are in the proposal stage, and target rules already held up by the courts, the argument goes. Liberal writers are trying to change Pruitt's perception on the right as a champion of deregulation.

"The truth is that Scott Pruitt has done a lot less to dismantle the EPA than he — or his critics — would have you believe," Politico columnist Michael Grunwald wrote in an article published Saturday.

"While Pruitt is often hailed (or attacked) as Trump's most effective (or destructive) deregulatory warrior, the recent spotlight on his ethics—allegations of a sweetheart housing deal; pay raises for favored aides; lavish spending on travel, furniture and security; and retaliation against underlings who questioned him—has arguably overshadowed his lack of regulatory rollbacks during his first 15 months in Washington," Grunwald wrote.

Democratic lawmakers and environmentalists want Pruitt to step down as EPA head in the wake of reporting he frequently flew first-class, circumvented the White House to get staffers raises and rented a room in a condo from the wife of a D.C. energy lobbyist.

Conservatives have come to Pruitt's defense, arguing the former Oklahoma attorney general's successes in rolling back Obama-era policies make him vital to the Trump administration. Environmentalists have attacked Pruitt for months over rolling back regulations, labeling him "Polluting Pruitt."

Now, liberal writers are trying to change the popular perception of Pruitt's accomplishments.

The New Republic's Emily Atkin noted that "most of Pruitt's actions are in the proposal stage, and many are years away from being finalized," though she did admit Pruitt had been "prolific" at tackling Obama-era policies.

"But so far, Pruitt's biggest achievement is that he appears successful. That explains his good standing with Trump, who values appearances more than anything else," she wrote.

The New York Times published an article on Saturday on how "legal experts and White House officials say that in Mr. Pruitt's haste to undo government rules and in his eagerness to hold high-profile political events promoting his agenda, he has often been less than rigorous in following important procedures, leading to poorly crafted legal efforts that risk being struck down in court."

The Times, mostly quoting Pruitt critics, reported that "[s]ix of Mr. Pruitt's efforts to delay or roll back Obama-era regulations ... have been struck down by the courts" and "backed down on a proposal to delay implementing smog regulations and another to withdraw a regulation on mercury pollution."

To some extent, it's true Pruitt's major deregulatory efforts are still in early stages. The Clean Power Plan repeal, for example, is in its proposal stage, and EPA has yet to formally revise Obama-era fuel economy standards. Pruitt also lost court battles over repealing some Obama regulations.

And Grunwald was correct when he wrote "major federal regulations are extremely difficult and time-consuming to enact, and just as difficult and time-consuming to reverse." The Obama administration had eight years to impose its agenda, but Pruitt's been around for about a year.

However, that doesn't mean Pruitt's not rolled back a significant number of rules. An EPA report released in March claimed 22 deregulatory actions in 2017, which could save \$1 billion in regulatory costs.

EPA has another 44 deregulatory actions underway, meaning 2018 could see billions more dollars worth of regulations repealed.

Either way, Trump seems happy with Pruitt's progress on rolling back regulations.

New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/09/climate/epa-ethics-letter-pruitt.html?rref=collection%2Ftime%2FEnvironmental%20Protection%20Agency>

In Letter to E.P.A., Top Ethics Officer Questions Pruitt's Actions

By Eric Lipton, 4/9/18

WASHINGTON — The federal government's top ethics official has taken the unusual step of sending a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency questioning a series of actions by Administrator Scott Pruitt and asking the agency to take "appropriate actions to address any violations."

The letter, sent to Kevin Minoli, the E.P.A. official designated as the agency's top ethics official, addresses questions about Mr. Pruitt's rental for \$50 a night of a condominium linked to an energy lobbyist, as well as his government-funded flights to his home state of Oklahoma. The letter also cites reporting last week in The New York Times that agency staff members who raised concerns about these and other actions found themselves transferred or demoted.

"The success of our government depends on maintaining the trust of the people we serve," said David J. Apol, acting director of the Office of Government Ethics, in the letter sent Monday morning to the E.P.A. "The American public needs to have confidence that ethics violations, as well as the appearance of ethics violations, are investigated and appropriately addressed."

The letter walks through the three areas of concern. The first is related to the Capitol Hill condo Mr. Pruitt rented early last year from the wife of an energy lobbyist whose firm had business matters before the E.P.A.

Mr. Apol noted that Mr. Pruitt did not apparently seek advice about the appropriateness of the deal until after he had moved out. Then, the agency ethics officer who was asked to evaluate the matter, which took place this month following news reports about the lease, was given "limited information" about the deal, and wasn't informed, for example, that Mr. Pruitt's daughter also used the condo.

Mr. Pruitt is another public servant brought to Washington by the president who can't or won't work within the rules and regulations of the...

"Additional information has now come to light that calls into question whether the earlier determination that the administrator paid market value for the use he made of the apartment would still be valid," Mr. Apol's letter says.

The trips home to Oklahoma, on flights paid by the government, also concerned Mr. Apol, who said that they “do raise concerns about whether the administrator is using his public office for personal gain in violation of ethics rules.” Mr. Apol noted there were also news reports that an E.P.A. staff member had been asked to help Mr. Pruitt find an apartment in Washington, which also might have violated rules.

Most disturbing, Mr. Apol said, were the reports in The Times that agency staff may have been punished after raising concerns about Mr. Pruitt’s actions.

“If true, it is hard to imagine any action that could more effectively undermine an agency’s integrity than punishing or marginalizing employees who strive to ensure compliance with the laws and regulations that safeguard that integrity,” the letter says.

The Office of Government Ethics does not have the power to punish Mr. Pruitt or to demand that he respond to the letter. But as the chief ethics officer for the executive branch of the federal government, Mr. Apol’s point of view has clout and he can ask that President Trump take action to punish a federal official who has violated federal rules.

The Hill

<http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/382268-top-ethics-official-asks-that-epa-appropriately-address-pruitt>

Top ethics official asks EPA to ‘appropriately address’ Pruitt controversies

By Timothy Cama, 4/9/18, 11:16 AM

The federal government’s top ethics official on Friday implored the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to properly investigate Administrator Scott Pruitt’s alleged ethical violations and potentially take action against him.

David Apol, acting director of the Office of Government Ethics (OGE), told the EPA’s top ethics official, Kevin Minoli, that Pruitt’s actions “raise concerns and may constitute a violation of the States of Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch” as well as President Trump’s ethics pledge.

“The American public needs to have confidence that ethics violations, as well as the appearance of ethics violations, are investigated and appropriately addressed,” Apol wrote in the letter, first reported Monday by the New York Times, and released publicly by OGE on Monday.

The letter came after a week of reports about numerous controversies involving Pruitt’s spending of taxpayer money, hiring practices, ethics and more.

The EPA and Pruitt have consistently defended his actions as above-board and compliant with relevant laws and standards, but numerous former ethics officials and ethics advocates have disagreed.

Apol and his office do not have the ability or authority to punish Pruitt for alleged ethical lapses.

Trump, who does have the power to fire Pruitt, tweeted Monday that two of the most high-profile controversies involving Pruitt — his travel expenses and his apartment rental — are “OK,” and Pruitt is “doing a great job!”

The EPA did not respond to a request for comment on the ethics letter Monday.

Apol’s letter focuses on three areas.

First is Pruitt’s rental last year from the wife of an energy lobbyist for just \$50 per day he slept there. Apol noted that Pruitt “did not seek ethics advice prior to entering into the lease,” for potential violations of gift rules and ethics staffers were provided “limited information” about it to write rulings on its compliance.

Second, Apol brought up Pruitt's spending on travel, security and aides' salaries, and the allegation that Pruitt enlisted an aide to help him shop for apartments.

"Reports of the administrator making frequent official trips to his home state at government expense to offset the expense of returning home for personal or political reasons do raise concerns about whether the administrator is using his public office for personal gain in violation of ethics rules," he said.

Lastly, Apol wrote of allegations that Pruitt punished staffers for objecting to his spending and management decisions, which he called "extremely concerning."

"If true, it is hard to imagine any action that could more effectively undermine an agency's integrity than punishing or marginalizing employees who strive to ensure compliance with the laws and regulations that safeguard that integrity," the ethics official wrote.

Walter Shaub, who preceded Apol atop OGE before resigning last year, has been outspoken against Pruitt, saying that there is a good chance his actions have violated ethics rules.

Fox News

<http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2018/04/07/epa-says-unprecedented-number-death-threats-against-pruitt.html>

EPA says 'unprecedented' number of death threats against Pruitt

By Joseph Weber, 4/8/18

EPA administrator Scott Pruitt has faced an "unprecedented" number of death threats, according to an agency spokesman.

His statement follows reports Pruitt has spent millions on security despite no proof his life was in danger.

"According to EPA's Assistant Inspector General, Scott Pruitt has faced an unprecedented amount of death threats against him and his family," agency spokesman Jahan Wilcox said late Friday. "Americans should all agree that members of the president's Cabinet should be kept safe from these violent threats."

The statement was obtained Saturday by Fox News and included a list of several published reports about such incidents.

@realDonaldTrump

While Security spending was somewhat more than his predecessor, Scott Pruitt has received death threats because of his bold actions at EPA. Record clean Air & Water while saving USA Billions of Dollars. Rent was about market rate, travel expenses OK. Scott is doing a great job!

President Trump tweeted his support for Pruitt on Saturday evening. "While Security spending was somewhat more than his predecessor, Scott Pruitt has received death threats because of his bold actions at EPA. Record clean Air & Water while saving USA Billions of Dollars. Rent was about market rate, travel expenses OK. Scott is doing a great job!"

A nationwide search of state and federal court records by the Associated Press found no case in which anyone was arrested or charged with threatening Pruitt, the wire service said Friday.

The agency has spent millions of dollars for a 20-member, full-time detail for Pruitt, which is roughly three times the size of his predecessor's part-time security contingent.

President Trump affirms that he still has confidence in his EPA administrator; chief national correspondent Ed Henry reports from Washington.

New details in Pruitt's expansive spending for security and travel emerged from agency sources and documents reviewed by the wire service. They come as Pruitt fends off allegations of profligate spending and ethical missteps.

Pruitt's domestic and international travel led to rapidly escalating costs, with the security detail racking up so much overtime that many hit annual salary caps of about \$160,000. The demands of providing 24-hour coverage even meant taking some investigators away from field work, such as when Pruitt traveled to California for a family vacation.

Total security costs reportedly are nearly \$3 million when pay is added to travel expenses.

Pruitt has said his use of first-class airfare was initiated following unpleasant interactions with other travelers. In one incident, someone yelled a profanity as he walked through the airport.

The EPA administrator also has come under intense scrutiny for big raises for two of closest aides and his rental of a Capitol Hill condo tied to a lobbyist who represents fossil fuel clients.

"This was like an Airbnb situation," Pruitt told Fox News on Wednesday, in an exclusive interview in which he defended his actions amid allegations of questionable spending. "When I was not there, the landlord, they had access to the entirety of the facility. When I was there, I only had access to a room."

At least three congressional Republicans and a chorus of Democrats have called for Pruitt's ouster. But Trump is so far standing by him.

A review of Pruitt's ethical conduct by White House officials is underway, adding to probes by congressional oversight committees and the EPA's inspector general.

Pruitt, 49, was closely aligned with the oil and gas industry as Oklahoma's state attorney general before being tapped by Trump, who has praised Pruitt's relentless efforts to scrap, delay or rewrite Obama-era environmental regulations.

Pruitt also has championed budget cuts and staff reductions at the agency so deep that even Republican budget hawks in Congress won't implement them.

EPA's press office has not disclosed the cost of Pruitt's security or the size of his protective detail, saying doing so could imperil his personal safety.

But other sources within EPA and documents released through public information requests help provide a window into the ballooning costs.

Pruitt's predecessor, Gina McCarthy, had a security detail that numbered about a half dozen, less than a third the size of Pruitt's. She flew coach and was not accompanied by security during her off hours.

The EPA spent nearly \$9,000 last year on increased counter-surveillance precautions for Pruitt, including hiring a private contractor to sweep his office for hidden listening devices and installing sophisticated biometric locks for the doors. The payment for the bug sweep went to a vice president at Perrotta's security company.

The EPA official who spoke to AP said Perrotta also arranged the installation of a \$43,000 soundproof phone booth for Pruitt's office.

At least five EPA officials were placed on leave, reassigned or demoted after pushing back against spending requests such as a \$100,000-a-month private jet membership, a bulletproof vehicle and \$70,000 for furniture such as a bulletproof desk for the armed security officer always stationed inside the administrator's office suite.

Those purchases were not approved.

Washington Post

https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/politics/wp/2018/04/09/a-new-call-for-investigating-pruitt-after-trump-already-offered-his-verdict/?utm_term=.063f4c451393

A new call for investigating Pruitt — after Trump already offered his verdict

By Philip Bump, 4/9/18, 2:23 PM

It's not clear what threats have been issued against EPA administrator Scott Pruitt. Patrick Sullivan, the agency's assistant inspector general, has repeatedly insisted that there have been more threats issued against Pruitt than against past EPA officials — a total of 70 in 2017, Sullivan told E&E News, compared to 45 in 2016.

Examples of those threats, though, are hard to come by. E&E pointed to two investigations, one a tweet targeting Pruitt and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) and the other an "obscene postcard" sent to the EPA. Sullivan told CNN last November that someone had threatened Pruitt by saying "I'm going to put a bullet in your brain" — but three weeks before that interview, a representative of the agency told BuzzFeed's Jason Leopold that she'd found no record of death threats issued against Pruitt. (A Post FOIA request about threats to Pruitt filed in October has not yet received a response.) The administrator famously insisted that his use of first-class travel was necessitated by having been accosted by other passengers on a flight, but the Associated Press reported over the weekend that Pruitt flies coach when the tab isn't being covered by the agency.

"A nationwide search of state and federal court records by AP found no case where anyone has been arrested or charged with threatening Pruitt," the AP report continued. "EPA's press office did not respond Friday to provide details of any specific threats or arrests."

In total, Pruitt's security has cost nearly \$3 million since he assumed his position. It's a huge price tag that, early on, drew resources from elsewhere in the agency.

Of all of the ethical questions surrounding Pruitt, and there are many, his spending on security is one of the most remarkable. It's at the root of many other questions: his travel costs, spending on furniture in his office and allegations reported by the New York Times on Friday that he'd demoted people who'd questioned his spending.

That spending and those ancillary actions contributed to a scathing letter sent by the Office of Government Ethics to the EPA's general counsel Friday. It questions the issues above and the rest of the Pruitt ethics diaspora, like his low-cost rental agreement with the wife of a lobbyist who had business before the agency. The OGE letter challenges the EPA to look closely at Pruitt's actions.

"The success of our Government depends on maintaining the trust of the people we serve," it reads. "The American public needs to have confidence that ethics violations, as well as the appearance of ethics violations, are investigated and appropriately addressed." If the EPA finds a violation, "OGE also expects that appropriate action will be taken in response."

There's good reason to assume that no action would actually be taken.

There have been numerous past ethics allegations issued against senior members of the Trump administration. Some are gone, like former VA secretary David Shulkin (who'd gotten free tickets to Wimbledon, among other things) and former Health and Human Services secretary Tom Price (who'd taken hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of charter flights). Others have faced no significant punishment beyond public embarrassment, like the expensive furniture sought by Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson or the multiple violations of the Hatch Act found by the White

House Office of Special Counsel. That includes violations by Kellyanne Conway, social media director Dan Scavino and U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, none of whom appear to have been punished in any significant way.

But the most significant reason to assume that Pruitt isn't poised for any punishment is that his boss, President Trump, has already weighed the evidence and come to his defense.

@realDonaldTrump

While Security spending was somewhat more than his predecessor, Scott Pruitt has received death threats because of his bold actions at EPA. Record clean Air & Water while saving USA Billions of Dollars. Rent was about market rate, travel expenses OK. Scott is doing a great job!

Luckily for Trump, Twitter expanded its limit to 280 characters, allowing the president to wave away all of the concerns about Pruitt in one tweet.

Why did Trump come to Pruitt's defense despite the slew of ethical questions surrounding him? One reason, certainly, is that Pruitt's activism at the EPA has made him both loathed by the left and celebrated by the right. While few people on the right were all that agitated about Tom Price before he got fired, there was an active push in the conservative media to preserve Pruitt as allegations against him snowballed last week. Rush Limbaugh described Pruitt as "the single biggest target of the left" on his show last week. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) put the argument succinctly in a tweet of his own.

@tedcruz

This is compelling. Why do Obama and his media cronies want so badly to drive @EPAScottPruitt out of office? @realDonaldTrump is too cagey to be duped and bullied by the Obama groupies.

<https://tinyurl.com/y978w3x8>

Trump's campaign pledge to drain the swamp would seem to be at odds with protecting Pruitt so quickly after questions were raised. But seeing Pruitt as a thumb in the eye of the left helps explain why Trump is happy to keep him around.

Nor has Trump ever seemed too worried about bolstering the ethical norms of the presidency. The first major-party candidate in 40 years not to release his taxes is now the president earning income from people who stop by his hotel in Washington — including those people who hold public events there with an eye toward making their spending obvious to the chief executive.

Trump may believe that Pruitt is innocent of overspending on security, of getting an unfair deal on rent and of spending too much on travel, as his tweet states. But he may also have been trying to decide between firing Pruitt, handing some kind of win to the left (and having another nomination fight on his hands) and simply looking the other way. He made have decided that politics were more important than ethics.

Let's say, for the sake of argument, that Pruitt's insistence that his life has been threatened has been blown out of proportion. That his 24-hour-a-day security protection is not based on need but on desire, rendering Trump's defense of his spending obsolete.

Trump subsequently arguing that dishonesty is a prohibitive quality for an official in his administration would be dissonant in its own way.

NPR

<https://www.npr.org/2018/04/09/600728837/what-doesnt-kill-you-makes-you-stronger-why-scott-pruitt-may-be-here-to-stay>

What Doesn't Kill You Makes You Stronger: Why Scott Pruitt May Be Here To Stay

By Ron Elving, 4/9/18, 9:55 AM

For days, the Washington world waited for the presidential tweet that would end the troubled tenure of Scott Pruitt, the high-profile and high-maintenance administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

It was hard to imagine anyone surviving an onslaught of stories like those recounting Pruitt's living large on several continents — with eye-popping costs for travel and security.

It was harder yet to imagine anyone enduring the personal exposure concerning his condo rental relationship with an oil industry lobbyist (complete with missed rent payments, changed locks and changing stories).

And surely it was hardest of all to imagine someone being effective running the EPA after a raft of reports about its internal bureaucratic brawls.

White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, under pressure himself, was reported to have urged Pruitt's dismissal. House Oversight Chairman Trey Gowdy said he was looking into Pruitt's case. And Pruitt himself seemed off balance in an interview with Fox News' Ed Henry.

But Monday dawned with Pruitt still in place and even looking a bit less embattled. The president's only weekend Twitter mention of his EPA guy dissed the mounting charges against him and added: "Scott is doing a great job!"

This could, of course, change at any moment — Twitter is always open, after all. The president has lauded other former aides right up to the hour of their firing. And Pruitt's survival could still prove to be just a time out for the president to find a suitable successor.

But the weekend did seem to bring a wind shift. Any thought that Pruitt might resign voluntarily has faded. Some of his Republican colleagues, such as Sen. Mike Rounds of South Dakota, have introduced the word "nitpicking" into their description of his travails.

So for the moment it appears Pruitt is not on his way out. And if what doesn't kill you makes you stronger, then Pruitt may still be on his way up.

Pruitt may survive and even prosper in Trump world for three reasons. First, his ethics issues are just that — ethics issues — and have yet to signify any actual setbacks for the president on policy or politics.

Second, a variety of conservative activist organizations and advocates have backed Pruitt vigorously — praising his efforts to roll back environmental and energy regulation and serve the broader agenda of the Trump presidency and the conservative movement.

Third, and perhaps most important, the political calculus always changes with the political calendar. What was unacceptable behavior for top level officials in the first year or so of the Trump administration might look different as the White House prepares to meet what may be greater challenges in the weeks and months ahead.

In other words, the time to circle the wagons may be nigh.

Let's take those three reasons one at a time.

First, Pruitt may have embarrassed the administration on the ethics front and become a negative story in the media, but he has been an unswerving servant of the Trump agenda at EPA. After having sued the agency himself as attorney general in Oklahoma, Pruitt needed no urging from his boss in this regard.

Lawsuits have blocked many of his directives, but the effort has been made and been counted a success in the Oval Office. Beyond that, Pruitt remains on task and can be trusted to own the deregulatory mission every day he is on the job.

Other cabinet members whose travel or business arrangements made news did not have the same protective covering. Former Congressman Tom Price ran afoul of various rules and strictures at a time when the GOP's drive to repeal the Affordable Care Act was stalling out. Price might have little to do with the ACA's final fate, but his association with the issue was not helpful for his case.

Similarly, David Shulkin had to defend his own travel arrangements and corner-cutting at the Veterans Administration at a time when Trump was growing impatient over the issue of private care for veterans outside the VA. Shulkin had been an administration star in 2017, pushing VA reforms through Congress that delighted the president. But by the spring of 2018, the stakes were higher and the game had changed.

If Pruitt's slavish devotion to de-regulation has boosted his stock with Trump, it has also endeared him to an array of conservative activists and organizations who have been looking for heroes. On Friday, the day Pruitt's fate seemed to hang in the balance, a letter from 10 influential leaders arrived at the White House thanking Trump for keeping Pruitt and urging him to stand fast.

Signatories included a coal industry advocate, but there were also Tea Party groups and conservative media critics. Perhaps most notable was the juxtaposition of the social issue Family Research Council with the investor-class Club for Growth.

"Pruitt is delivering on policy changes that conservatives have wanted to see for years, if not decades," Jenny Beth Martin of the Tea Party Patriots told Politico.

Also signing the pro-Pruitt initiative was Ed Meese, the second attorney general for President Ronald Reagan in the 1980s. Meese's signature did carry some irony. It was 30 years ago this spring that he resigned as attorney general under a cloud, several months before the end of his term. An independent counsel had criticized his conduct on behalf of a defense contractor (Wedtech) in a case that later brought courtroom convictions for several other state and federal officials.

Today, at age 86, Meese is still active with various conservative think tanks. His involvement for Pruitt underlines the movement's willingness to focus on results and let others stew over the behavior of the officials achieving those results.

In this sense, Pruitt's ultimate protection may be the way his dueling images — controversial and consequential — mirror those of the president himself.

Finally, the decision about Pruitt's job is overshadowed by what lies immediately ahead — not for Pruitt but for the president. In a matter of weeks, many expect the expanding investigation led by special counsel Robert Mueller to reach a critical mass. At that point, the potential threat to individuals in the president's innermost circle may become real. And if few expect the president himself to become a criminal target of the probe, he is reported to be part of the criminal investigation.

When Mueller finally shows all his cards, there could be a confrontation with the president. There could also be a confrontation between the president and elements of the court system, or between the president and the Congress. In any of these events, the president will need to have the conservative movement stand behind him — unified and unflinching.

So far, at least, that movement has been totally in Trump's corner — thankful for the judgeships and the tax cuts and the executive orders. But there have been rumblings over the \$1.3 trillion omnibus spending bill Trump signed in March, regarded as an abomination on the right. And some are disturbed not just by the Stormy Daniels imbroglio but by the prospect of other compromising tales.

That is why, at this moment in particular, Trump does not wish to disturb any of the cornerstones in his base, including and especially those represented on the Pruitt letter. And that dependence will not lessen in the fall, when the president

and his party will need these same voters to be eagerly engaged when the next day of reckoning — the midterm elections.

The November elections will determine control of Congress for two years, but will also determine the control of 36 governorships — nearly all of them for four years. And in a broader sense, they will render the most important verdict to date on the first half of Trump's term.

Politico

<https://www.politicopro.com/energy/article/2018/04/gowdy-says-in-activist-video-hes-probing-pruitt-470342>

Gowdy says he's looking into Pruitt

By Alex Guillen, 4/7/18, 12:42 AM, Updated 12:52 PM

House Oversight Chairman Trey Gowdy (R-S.C.) indicated he has begun inquiring into EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's activities, according to a video shot by activists on Friday and released by Friends of the Earth.

"I don't have a lot patience for that kind of stuff," Gowdy told activists at a signing of his new book co-authored with Sen. Tim Scott (R-S.C.).

Gowdy didn't say whether his committee has begun a formal investigation of Pruitt or some more preliminary review, but he said that public servants must "be a good steward" of taxpayer money. Pruitt has faced a stream of questions about his \$50-a-night condo rental from the wife of an energy lobbyist, as well as his expensive security arrangements and first-class air travel.

Asked by the activists whether Pruitt had turned over all requested documents, Gowdy said his committee has viewed them, but has not actually obtained copies.

"They let us come over and see them," Gowdy said. "I'm not sure he's going to make it that long. It gets worse every time there's a report in the news."

Scott was present for the exchange but did not say anything about Pruitt, according to Friends of the Earth.

The group later released a second version of the video with clearer imagery.

Reuters

<https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-congress-pruitt/u-s-house-panel-investigating-pruitts-condo-rental-idUSL1N1RK09Y>

U.S. House panel investigating Pruitt's condo rental

4/7/18, 3:44 PM

WASHINGTON, April 7 (Reuters) - A U.S. congressional panel is investigating Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt's use of a condominium tied to an energy lobbyist, a House Republican aide said on Saturday.

The House of Representatives Oversight Committee, chaired by Republican Representative Trey Gowdy, has begun looking into Pruitt's housing arrangements, according to the aide, who was not authorized to speak publicly.

The EPA had no immediate comment.

The panel's probe adds to the pressure on Pruitt, a vocal critic of mainstream climate change science who sued the EPA more than a dozen times when he was Oklahoma's attorney general. Many Democrats and even a few Republicans have said should resign or be fired.

Lawmakers have been scrutinizing Pruitt for renting a room in a high-end townhouse co-owned by the wife of energy industry lobbyist Steven Hart for \$50 a night, an arrangement that has drawn fire from ethics experts. Media reports say the payment is less than one-third the price of similar properties.

Hart lobbies for companies regulated by the EPA.

Pruitt is also under fire for frequent first-class air travel and for purchasing costly items for his office, including a soundproof telephone booth.

"I don't have a lot of patience with that kind of stuff," Gowdy said of Pruitt in a video released by the environmental group Friends of the Earth. "You've just got to be a good steward of public services."

As part of the committee's investigation, the EPA has produced documents, including a memo from the EPA ethics office that initially cleared Pruitt of accepting a gift from a lobbyist but did not address whether he broke other federal ethics regulations.

An administration official said Pruitt met with President Donald Trump on Friday morning, a week after White House Chief of Staff John Kelly advocated for Trump to fire him. Trump told reporters on Thursday that he would take a look into ethics allegations against Pruitt but added the official was doing a "fantastic job." (Reporting by David Morgan; Editing by Tim Ahmann and Sandra Maler)

Reuters

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-congress-pruitt/trump-stands-by-embattled-epa-chief-pruitt-in-tweet-idUSKBN1HEORN>

Trump stands by embattled EPA chief Pruitt in Tweet

4/7/18, 3:59 PM

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - President Donald Trump on Saturday defended his embattled head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt, and said the official's travel and security expenses were reasonable.

Taxpayers have paid more to protect Pruitt than past EPA chiefs but those expenses are justified since Pruitt has been under threat, Trump wrote.

"Scott Pruitt has received death threats because of his bold actions at EPA," Trump wrote.

The costs of Pruitt's security detail have come under scrutiny recently as have the costs of his travel and housing in Washington. Trump defended those costs, too.

"Rent was about market rate, travel expenses OK. Scott is doing a great job!" Trump wrote.

The head of a congressional oversight panel is investigating Pruitt's use of a condominium tied to an energy lobbyist, an aide said on Saturday.

The House of Representatives Oversight Committee, chaired by Republican Representative Trey Gowdy, has begun looking into Pruitt's housing arrangements, according to the aide, who was not authorized to speak publicly.

On Friday, an EPA spokesman said Pruitt has faced “unprecedented” threats and security has been costly.

“Americans should all agree that members of the President’s cabinet should be kept safe,” said EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox.

Gowdy’s probe adds to the pressure on Pruitt, a vocal critic of mainstream climate change science who sued the EPA more than a dozen times when he was Oklahoma’s attorney general. Many Democrats and even a few Republicans have said he should resign or be fired.

Lawmakers have been scrutinizing Pruitt for renting a room in a high-end townhouse co-owned by the wife of energy industry lobbyist Steven Hart for \$50 a night, an arrangement that has drawn fire from ethics experts. Media reports say the payment is less than one-third the price of similar properties.

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An administration official said Pruitt met with President Donald Trump on Friday morning, a week after White House Chief of Staff John Kelly advocated for Trump to fire him. Trump told reporters on Thursday that he would take a look into ethics allegations against Pruitt but added the official was doing a “fantastic job.”

AP

<https://apnews.com/d9732c84c265451ab5bc965d3def8d83/Trump-stands-by-EPA-chief-as-probes-into-his-conduct-expand>

Trump stands by EPA chief as probes into his conduct expand

By Michael Biesecker, 4/9/18

WASHINGTON (AP) — Scott Pruitt is facing new and expanded ethics investigations for his handling of taxpayer dollars and possible perks he’s gotten as head of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Staff for the Republican-led House Oversight committee confirmed Monday that it has expanded its review of Pruitt’s travel spending to now include ethical questions surrounding his bargain \$50-a-night rental of a Capitol Hill condo tied to a fossil fuels lobbyist.

The Office of Government Ethics also has issued a letter to EPA demanding documents related to the condo rental. And it reports that at least five agency officials faced retaliation after questioning Pruitt’s outsized spending for travel, unprecedented security precautions and pricey office furniture.

In a letter dated Friday, Acting Government Ethics Director David Apol called media reports of Pruitt’s actions “extremely concerning.”

“The success of our government depends on maintaining the trust of the people we serve,” Apol wrote. “The American public needs to have confidence that ethics violations, as well as the appearance of ethics violations, are investigated and properly addressed.”

President Donald Trump defended Pruitt in a tweet Saturday night, saying the EPA chief is “doing a great job” and downplaying the ethical questions swirling around Pruitt. He called Pruitt’s security spending “somewhat more” than Pruitt’s predecessor and said Pruitt had received death threats “because of his bold actions at EPA.”

Pruitt is expected to be at the White House on Monday for a Cabinet meeting with the president.

EPA Inspector General Arthur Elkins is now conducting at least five investigative audits related to Pruitt, including a previously undisclosed probe into questionable spending by his swollen security detail. The Associated Press reported Friday that the 20-member team tasked with providing day-and-night protection for Pruitt had racked up salary, overtime and travel expenses approaching \$3 million.

Jennifer Kaplan, the spokeswoman for the inspector general, also confirmed Monday that the internal watchdog has received multiple requests from members of Congress and the public for his office to examine whether Pruitt’s condo rental constituted an impermissible gift under federal ethic rules. A decision on whether to launch a new investigation into that issue is expected in coming days.

The property, where Pruitt’s daughter also lived last summer while interning at the White House, is co-owned by the wife of the top executive at a powerhouse Washington lobbying firm with clients who have received favorable regulatory actions from EPA. Pruitt maintains the owner is a personal friend and that he paid a fair market rate, even though rentals nearby have advertised rates on more than twice what he paid.

The broader probe launched by EPA’s inspector general into Pruitt’s security spending grew out of a 2016 audit into whether members of the administrator’s protective detail were improperly paid overtime wages. A separate investigation was launched in November into whether members of EPA’s internal law enforcement arm actually worked hours reflected on their timesheets.

Elkins has also opened an audit into whether Pruitt improperly used authority granted under the Safe Drinking Water Act to provide massive raises to two of his closest aides. Pruitt denied knowing about the raises in a media interview last week, even though the statutory authority under which the raises were granted requires his approval.

That’s on top of previously ongoing investigations into the administrator’s outsized travel spending and purchase of a \$43,000 soundproof privacy booth purchased for the administrator to make private phone calls. Pruitt has cited security concerns as justification of his flying in first-class airline seats with his security chief, a perk not generally afforded to federal employees.

However, on occasions when taxpayers weren’t paying for his ticket, Pruitt sat in coach on personal trips to attend college football games in his home state of Oklahoma. The Associated Press also reported that Pruitt sometimes flew on a companion pass obtained with the frequent flyer miles of Ken Wagner, a former law partner from Oklahoma that Pruitt hired to serve as a senior adviser at the EPA. Taxpayers still covered the airfare for the administrator’s security detail.

Walter Shaub, who until last year ran the Office of Government Ethics, told the AP it was likely an ethics violation if Pruitt accepted the airline tickets, even if Wagner didn’t pay cash for them. Federal officials are barred from accepting gifts from employees that have a market value of more than \$10.

Pruitt’s spokesman, Jahan Wilcox, says Pruitt has faced an unprecedented number of death threats against him and his family and “Americans should all agree that members of the President’s cabinet should be kept safe from these violent threats.”

A nationwide search of state and federal court records by the AP found no case where anyone has been arrested or charged with threatening Pruitt. EPA's press office did not respond Friday to provide details of any specific threats or arrests.

The Hill

<http://thehill.com/homenews/senate/382168-gop-senator-pruitt-should-face-the-press>

GOP senator: Pruitt should face the press

By Mallory Shelbourne, 4/8/18, 11:30 AM

Republican Sen. John Kennedy (R-La.) said Sunday that Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt should face the press amid his mounting controversies.

"I would do a full blown press conference and say 'OK here are your criticisms. That's fair. I'm going to stop doing it. Here's what I think is not fair,'" Kennedy told CBS's "Face the Nation" of Pruitt.

"But these people are hurting the president and I'm not saying he's not a good person," he added. "But the appearance of impropriety matters."

The embattled EPA head has been under intense scrutiny over his reported relationship with lobbyists and use of taxpayer funds for matters like security and travel.

But President Trump has insisted Pruitt "is doing a great job."

"While security spending was somewhat more than his predecessor, Scott Pruitt has received death threats because of his bold actions at EPA," Trump said Saturday evening.

Kennedy said it's up to Trump as to whether Pruitt should retain his Cabinet position, but that the continued missteps need to end.

"There are a lot of problems we can't solve. But you can behave. I'm not — I don't mean to denigrate Mr. Pruitt but doggone it he represents the president of the United States and it is hurting his boss and it needs to stop," Kennedy said.

Other Republican senators have also expressed concern over Pruitt's scandals, including Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), who said it "doesn't look good" for the EPA head.

Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) also said Pruitt's fate in the administration is up to Trump.

"This daily drip of accusations, of excessive spending and ethical violations served to further distract the agency from accomplishing its very important mission," Collins told CNN's "State of the Union."

Politico

<https://www.politico.com/story/2018/04/06/scott-pruitt-trump-conservatives-job-506388>

Conservatives unite to ask Trump to keep Pruitt

By Lorraine Woellert, 4/6/18, 4:04 PM, Updated 6:27 PM

Conservative leaders are urging President Donald Trump to stand behind embattled EPA chief Scott Pruitt, organizing for the first time to present a unified front in defense of a Trump Cabinet official.

In a letter delivered to the White House on Friday, the group of prominent conservatives thanked Trump for sticking with Pruitt, one of their ideological brethren, and said, in essence, that Pruitt's policy accomplishments made him worth the trouble.

"The days of a rogue, agenda driven EPA are over," the group wrote. "Scott Pruitt is a bold, capable manager and is right for this job. His record shows you made the right choice picking him. We are certain he will guide EPA through the coming years of your Administration as a courageous and qualified administrator."

The letter was signed by the leaders of 10 influential conservative organizations, including former Attorney General Edwin Meese, William Walton of CNP Action, Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council, Michael Needham of Heritage Action, Adam Brandon of FreedomWorks, Jenny Beth Martin of Tea Party Patriots Citizen Fund, Brent Bozell of the Media Research Center and David McIntosh, president of the Club for Growth.

"Pruitt is delivering on policy changes that conservatives have wanted to see for years, if not decades," Martin said. "There's not a single member of the cabinet who has managed to deliver regulation rollbacks as much as Scott Pruitt has."

Martin said it was the first time the group had come together to defend a Trump administration official, and added that she hadn't seen any Pruitt behavior that rises to a fireable offense.

"This is the conservative movement coming forward and saying this guy is rock star," said another strategist involved in crafting the letter. "I have not seen a more united conservative front on behalf of a Cabinet member since the Reagan administration."

Pruitt has been dogged by ethics scandals for months over his lavish spending on travel and security, and is facing multiple EPA inspector general investigations. The scrutiny intensified in recent days, after news broke that he rented a \$50-a-night condo from a lobbyist couple.

Since then, the damaging stories have kept coming. He reportedly sidelined aides who questioned his travel and security costs, and has been accused of requesting sirens and lights to speed his trips around Washington.

The allegations are in addition to the inspector general investigations looking into Pruitt's taxpayer-funded travel, his use of a special hiring authority and his spending on a soundproof phone booth for his office.

Even as White House officials have soured on Pruitt — POLITICO reported earlier this week that chief of staff John Kelly was considering firing Pruitt in the coming months — Trump has publicly supported the EPA chief.

"I think he's done a fantastic job. I think he's done an incredible job," Trump told reporters aboard Air Force One on Thursday. "He's been very courageous. It hasn't been easy, but I think he's done a fantastic job."

Daily Caller

<http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/06/conservatives-support-scott-pruitt/>

Conservatives Circle The Wagons Around Troubled EPA Administrator

By Thomas Phippen, 4/6/18, 6:23 PM

Conservative leaders expressed support for embattled EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt as Democrats and activists call for his resignation.

More than sixty conservatives signed a memo of support for Pruitt on Friday, hailing the administrator's significant role in implementing President Donald Trump's deregulatory agenda.

"President Trump campaigned on reducing Washington's bureaucracy, and Administrator Pruitt has been instrumental to that effort," the memo says. "His leadership has helped President Trump keep his promises in a number of critical areas which conservatives support."

Conservatives appreciate Pruitt's work finalizing 22 deregulatory actions allowing businesses to save more than \$1 billion in compliance costs, cleaning up Superfund sites, and ending the agency's "sue-and-settle agreements," which conservatives allege has been manipulated by radical environmentalists for years in order "to use taxpayer money to dictate energy and environmental policy."

"He is critical to President Trump's efforts to streamline agency efforts in a way that assists American families and the economy. We applaud President Trump for his appointment of Scott Pruitt and support his continued tenure at the EPA," the letter says.

Among the signers are Jim DeMint, former senator and former president of the Heritage Foundation, FreedomWorks President Adam Brandon, David Keene, Washington Times editor-at-large, and a host of others. (Neil Patel, president of The Daily Caller News Foundation and CEO of The Daily Caller, is one of the signatories of the letter.)

Democrats and environmental activists have called for Pruitt's resignation for months, but even though the negative headlines have increased in recent days, Trump has been publicly unwavering in his support. Pruitt is "doing a great job but is TOTALLY under siege," Trump said in a tweet Friday denying reports he was considered replacing Attorney General Jeff Sessions with Pruitt.

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi called directly for Pruitt's resignation Friday, saying his "tenure has been a part of the Trump Administration's culture of corruption, cronyism and incompetence."

"Pruitt has displayed a staggering ethical blindness, and his abuses of office are representative of an Administration that uses their powerful positions to enrich themselves and their friends," Pelosi said.

The host of alleged scandals surrounding Pruitt include his frequent use of government funds to book first class flights instead of coach seats, which The New York Times estimates cost taxpayers \$120,000 and a five-day staff trip to Morocco worth \$40,000.

He also reportedly rented room in an energy lobbyist's Washington, D.C., condo for \$50 a night, an arrangement ethics officials found to be a fair market value, according to the EPA.

The Hill

<http://thehill.com/homenews/sunday-talk-shows/382166-gop-senator-defends-pruitt-some-criticisms-are-overblown>

GOP senator defends Pruitt: Some criticisms are 'overblown'

By Brett Samuels, 4/8/18, 11:20 AM

Sen. Mike Rounds (R-S.D.) on Sunday defended Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt amid a firestorm of ethics controversies, saying the agency head has done a good job implementing President Trump's agenda.

"The reason why all of the emphasis right now is on Mr. Pruitt is because he is executing these policies and they're not popular policies with a lot of people. But he is executing policies this president said he would put in place," Rounds said on NBC's "Meet The Press."

Pruitt has faced intense scrutiny in recent days following reports that he rented a room in a condo owned by the wife of a prominent energy lobbyist during his first several months in D.C. The unit cost him \$50 a day, he only paid for nights that he slept there and his daughter occasionally stayed in the condo as well.

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee has launched an investigation into the housing arrangement.

In addition, it was reported that Pruitt authorized raises for two of his top staffers despite the White House rejecting the pay increase, and that he cost taxpayers millions of dollars on security and travel costs.

Other Republican senators have expressed concerns over Pruitt's behavior.

Rounds said Sunday that he's unsure how big of a deal each of the controversies really are. For example, he questioned if having a large security detail warrants someone's firing.

"I don't know how much of it is overblown and how much of it is accurate," he said. "I'm not going to call it fake news, I'm going to say in some cases we'll overblow something."

"Let's take a look at how many dollars the EPA can actually save. The big picture," he continued. "You know, we'll nitpick little things. He has too many people on his security detail. It may add up to, to more than what the previous guy did. But what about the big picture."

Trump defended Pruitt late Saturday, brushing aside the housing controversy and saying the EPA head is "doing a great job."

The Hill

<http://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/382249-gop-chairman-backs-pruitt-amid-controversies>

GOP chairman backs Pruitt amid controversies

By Timothy Cama, 4/9/18, 9:53 AM

The chairman of the Senate panel that oversees the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is standing by the agency's embattled administrator pending the White House's investigations into his recent controversies.

Sen. John Barrasso (R-Wyo.), chairman of the Environment and Public Works Committee, on Monday applauded Pruitt for his tenure so far at the EPA.

"Administrator [Scott] Pruitt has accomplished key priorities as head of the EPA," Barrasso said in a statement. "With the support of the president, he has been instrumental in returning the agency to its original mission. American workers are benefiting from his reversal of punishing regulations."

Barrasso acknowledged that "certain questions have been raised" about Pruitt's actions, referring to recent reports about Pruitt's rental for \$50 per day from a lobbyist last year, the raises his agency gave to two top aides after the White House rejected them, and aides who were reportedly punished after pushing back against his spending or management decisions.

"The White House has indicated it has taken on a formal review of these questions. I will wait for the outcome of that process," Barrasso said.

Three GOP senators on Sunday news shows criticized Pruitt. Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) said Pruitt "is the wrong person to head the EPA," Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) said "this doesn't look good," and Sen. John Kennedy (R-La.) told Pruitt to "stop acting like a chucklehead."

Meanwhile, three House GOP lawmakers have joined numerous Democrats in calling for Pruitt to resign or be fired over the scandals: Reps. Carlos Curbelo (Fla.), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (Fla.) and Elise Stefanik (N.Y.), all from tight districts being targeted by Democrats in the 2018 midterm elections.

The Senate is due to vote this week to confirm Andrew Wheeler, a former coal lobbyist, to be Pruitt's deputy at the EPA.

Bloomberg

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-04-06/from-forbes-to-tea-party-allies-on-right-rally-for-epa-s-pruitt>

From Forbes to Tea Party, Allies on Right Rally for EPA's Pruitt

By Jennifer A Dlouhy and Ari Natter, 4/6/18, 5:41 PM

Conservative stars are coming out in force in a bid to save the job of Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt, a zealous advocate of their small-government movement engulfed by allegations of ethical lapses.

Prominent Republicans and leaders of the Tea Party movement -- from publishing executive Steve Forbes to Senator Rand Paul -- are penning op-eds, posting on Twitter, and picking up the phone to personally beseech President Donald Trump to keep Pruitt at the helm of the EPA.

"He's a conservative hero," Dallas investor Doug Deason, whose family has given millions to right-wing candidates, said of Pruitt. "It would be a huge mistake to do anything other than come out and support him."

High-profile business leaders including billionaire oilman Harold Hamm have also been enlisted to make personal entreaties, and tell the president that Pruitt has done more than other top administration official to ease federal regulations standing in the way of manufacturing, mining, and drilling.

The right's fondness for Pruitt is matched by the animosity he inspires among the political left. Environmentalists have campaigned against Pruitt since his confirmation in February 2017, casting him as an unabashed ally of corporate polluters who is dismantling regulations essential to safeguard the land, air and water.

"It's a pretty sad statement of the priorities of these right-wing ideologues that they think someone who is clearly unethical and has no respect for taxpayers or the law is okay to keep around, as long as he pushes their dangerous agenda," said John Coequyt, the Sierra Club's senior director of federal policy. "Pruitt has been nothing more than their puppet, putting public health at risk to help corporate polluter's bottom line, and this is exactly why he needs to go."

'Very Courageous'

Publicly, Trump has offered praise for Pruitt, telling reporters Thursday that he had confidence in the embattled EPA chief and calling him "very courageous" amid a barrage of damaging revelations. Trump underscored that on Friday with a post on Twitter saying Pruitt "is doing a great job but is TOTALLY under siege."

Nevertheless, Pruitt's standing at the White House is far from secure. Top administration officials have been skeptical of his explanation about how two close aides secured raises worth tens of thousands of dollars a year over the White House's objection, according to people familiar with the matter. And they're frustrated by the spate of bad news surrounding Pruitt, including reports he rented a Capitol Hill bedroom from a lobbyist and that several EPA staff who questioned him were transferred to other jobs.

White House Chief of Staff John Kelly told Trump last week that Pruitt needed to go but the president is resisting firing him, the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times reported. The Associated Press reported that Pruitt visited the White House on Friday to discuss his agency's recent steps to roll back Obama-era fuel efficiency standards for cars but also fought for his job in a meeting with the president.

Counter Effort

The conservative counter-effort involves darlings of the right. Edwin Meese III, an attorney general in the Reagan administration, former South Carolina Senator Jim DeMint, Family Research Council President Tony Perkins, and more than 100 other prominent leaders on the right issued a memo Friday highlighting Pruitt's policy accomplishments and casting the EPA leader as instrumental to the president's mission to slash through Washington bureaucracy.

"He is critical to President Trump's efforts to streamline agency efforts in a way that assists American families and the economy," said the group. Other notable signers included James Dobson, founder of Family Talk; David Bossie, the president of Citizens United; and Richard Viguerie, chairman of ConservativeHQ.com.

Forbes, the millionaire chairman and editor-in-chief of Forbes Media Inc. who ran for president in 1996 and 2000, penned an opinion piece for Investor's Business Daily arguing that Pruitt is under fire simply because he's been too effective at "boldly redirecting the EPA" and reining in "a once-rogue agency that operated far beyond its constitutional authority."

FreedomWorks

"Pruitt is the right man for the job and it's no wonder the radical left is screaming for his ouster," Forbes said.

Kenneth Cuccinelli, a former Virginia attorney general and Republican gubernatorial candidate, lent his voice to a roundup of praise for Pruitt circulated by the powerful conservative advocacy group FreedomWorks. The group also is recruiting conservative voices to join the cause, with a Twitter campaign urging supporters to call the White House switchboard with endorsements of the EPA chief.

Pruitt's defenders are making a political argument too, with some warning that Trump's support in Republican presidential primaries two years from now could be undermined if he jettisons one of the most conservative members of his cabinet.

And they see Pruitt as one of their own.

Dallas Cowboys

Deason, whose family has given millions to conservative candidates, said he sent texts and emails Thursday to staff members he knows at the White House in support of Pruitt.

"We burned a lot of chits to get him into that position," Deason said of Pruitt, describing him as a "really good friend" who has joined him at Dallas Cowboys NFL football games.

Pruitt's supporters have warned that getting any replacement nominee approved by the Senate -- much less one as dogged as Pruitt -- could be impossible.

Unless a White House investigation were to prove Pruitt did something worthy of termination, Deason, who also donates to the political network led by billionaires Charles and David Koch, said he wants to see Trump continue to support him.

Conservative Champion

The EPA leader was well known in conservative circles even before he came to Washington, having garnered support for his willingness to challenge the federal bureaucracy -- including the agency he now leads.

Pruitt built his political career fighting federal regulations he said stripped power away from states, including the Affordable Care Act, and in his previous role as Oklahoma attorney general, Pruitt joined more than a dozen lawsuits challenging EPA actions under the Obama administration.

Pruitt's star has only risen among conservative elites since he took over the EPA. He's proposed scrapping the Clean Power Plan, former President Barack Obama's rule that aimed to pare greenhouse gas emissions. He's also rewriting a water pollution rule and has effectively quashed an effort to write new limits on methane leaks from oil wells.

Pruitt, 49, has been a high-profile speaker at the Conservative Political Action Conference for two years, including a keynote address delivered in February. And he's been a regular speaker in front of the Federalist Society, a group of conservatives and libertarians eager to reform the U.S. legal system.

'Obama Groupies'

"Without hyperbole, Administrator Pruitt is the most conservative member of the cabinet, both in temperament and action," said Republican strategist Mike McKenna. "He's also the guy who has done the most for the president's agenda; he's simultaneously the most conservative and the most committed to the president's agenda."

Some supporters are appealing to Trump's business sense; others to his vanity. Senator Ted Cruz used Twitter to urge Trump not "to be duped and bullied by the Obama groupies" that the Texas Republican said are eager to push Pruitt out.

And Paul tweeted that Pruitt, "likely the bravest and most conservative member of Trump's cabinet," is necessary to help the president "drain the regulatory swamp." Paul is a Republican from Kentucky whose constant calls to slash government spending and regulations have made him a hero of the Tea Party.

Talking Points

The pro-Pruitt message is getting an assist from CRC Public Relations, a Virginia-based firm headed by Greg Mueller, onetime communications director for Pat Buchanan. The firm, which has sent circulated talking points and highlighted pro-Pruitt commentary, has a number of clients supportive of the EPA administrator, "including Tea Party Patriots and Steve Forbes," Mueller said in an emailed statement.

"Director Pruitt is advancing pro-growth and pro-environment policies that the center-right constituency has advocated for decades," Mueller said. "When a conservative leader like Director Pruitt is advancing conservative policies or under attack, we engage."

CNN

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/06/politics/tony-perkins-scott-pruitt-ethics-controversies-erin-burnett-cnn-tv/index.html>

Evangelical leader Tony Perkins defends Scott Pruitt: 'I don't think there's anything there'

By Leinz Vales, 4/7/18, 4:15 PM

Evangelical leader Tony Perkins defended Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt on Friday against a growing list of ethics controversies, saying he does not believe "there's anything there."

"The President has been very clear that these things are problematic as you look at them on their face," Perkins told CNN's Erin Burnett.

Perkins, president of the Family Research Council, argued that the controversies and allegations should be put in context. He cited security concerns to defend Pruitt in one of the controversies.

"I've spoken to a number of these Cabinet secretaries who are being threatened and harassed when they get on planes and they're flying in coach," he said. "He's getting eight times the number of threats his predecessor got."

Pruitt defended his first-class travel in February by saying it was for security purposes, citing the "toxic environment" in politics and implying he was less likely to face threats in a first-class crowd.

"This is how vicious things have become in the polarized political environment," Perkins added. "So I think you have to look at that all in the context of personal security."

Perkins, a supporter of President Donald Trump's socially conservative policies, said in January that the evangelical community has given the President a "mulligan" when it comes to his personal behavior.

Citing Perkins' evangelical background, Burnett asked about concerns that Americans may have with Pruitt's list of ethics scandals.

"Do you, though, understand the concerns some might have?" Burnett asked. "They say you're speaking for evangelicals. As a man of faith, a man who defends morals and character. And we are seeing someone who appears to be compromised on that front, but ... it doesn't seem to bother you. Why?"

Perkins said he did not see a problem with the EPA chief trying to protect himself.

"What about the condo?" Burnett countered.

"I don't know all the facts in the condo," Perkins said.

In late March, ABC News reported that Pruitt stayed in a condo co-owned by Vicki Hart, a lobbyist whose husband, J. Steven Hart, works for a firm that has lobbied on energy issues. A Bloomberg report said the deal on the condo gave Pruitt a price of \$50 a night for a bedroom, and only on nights when he slept there.

Perkins continued to argue that he couldn't comment on condo controversy because he didn't know the details.

Burnett told Perkins, "It feels like you're cherry-picking."

Perkins denied he was being selective with Pruitt's controversies, but went on to highlight the EPA chief's success at accomplishing the Trump administration's agenda.

"The President likes him," he said. "It's been good for business. The left is upset with him. They're going to find anything they can. And if there's anything there, I believe it will come out."

Politico

<https://www.politico.com/story/2018/04/08/kennedy-pruitt-epa-senate-508290>

Republican senator urges Pruitt to 'behave'

By Eli Okun, 4/8/18, 12:20 PM

Sen. John Kennedy on Sunday urged embattled EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt to "behave," as mounting ethics controversies swirl around him.

"These are unforced errors. They're stupid. There are a lot of problems we can't solve. But you can behave," the Louisiana Republican said on CBS' "Face the Nation."

"I don't mean to denigrate Mr. Pruitt," the senator went on, "but doggone it, he represents the president of the United States, and it is hurting his boss. And it needs to stop."

Pruitt has come under fire for a series of ethics controversies, including renting a room from a lobbyist couple, using taxpayer dollars to travel first-class and spending millions on extra security and a soundproof phone booth. The EPA inspector general has opened multiple investigations.

But even as the media chorus grew louder last week — and a few House Republicans joined dozens of Democrats in calling for Pruitt's exit — President Donald Trump has publicly held firm in his support.

"Record clean Air & Water while saving USA Billions of Dollars. Rent was about market rate, travel expenses OK. Scott is doing a great job!" the president tweeted Saturday evening.

Kennedy suggested that Pruitt hold a press conference to address the criticisms.

Sen. Susan Collins of Maine, the only Republican to vote against Pruitt's nomination last year, said on CNN's "State of the Union" that her vote had been vindicated by Pruitt's actions.

"This daily drip of accusations of excessive spending and ethical violations serve to further distract the agency from accomplishing its very important mission," she said. "Congress needs to do some oversight. ... But on policy grounds alone, I think Scott Pruitt is the wrong person to head the EPA."

And Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) said on ABC's "This Week" that he liked Pruitt's accomplishments at the EPA, but was waiting to see where congressional oversight led.

"If you're the EPA administrator and two lobbyists change the locks, you've got a problem," Graham said. "The bottom line: This doesn't look good."

Washington Times

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/apr/8/sen-john-kennedy-tells-scott-pruitt-stop-leading-y/>

GOP Sen. John Kennedy to Scott Pruitt: 'Stop leading with your chin'

By David Sherfinski, 4/8/18

Several Republican senators on Sunday voiced concern about the recent conduct of embattled Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt, who is fighting to hold onto his job amid a series of reports of exorbitant security and travel spending.

Sen. John Kennedy, Louisiana Republican, advised Mr. Pruitt to stop "stop leading with your chin" and said Mr. Pruitt needs to cut out "stupid" "unforced errors" amid the recently reported ethical lapses.

"I would say ethics matter, impropriety matters, the appearance of impropriety matters," Mr. Kennedy, Louisiana Republican, said on CBS's "Face the Nation."

"To the extent that you are, stop acting like a chucklehead, stop the unforced error[s], stop leading with your chin," he said.

"If you don't need to fly first class, don't. Don't turn on the siren on your SUV just to watch people move over. You represent the president of the United States," Mr. Kennedy said, calling Mr. Pruitt's reported recent behavior a "juvenile" distraction.

Mr. Pruitt is under fire amid recent reports on his travel and security spending and a \$50-per-night Capitol Hill condominium he rented from the wife of an energy lobbyist — who reportedly changed the locks on him after trying to push him out.

Sen. Lindsey Graham, South Carolina Republican, said he likes Mr. Pruitt and that he's done a good job as EPA administrator, but that the \$50-a-night deal sounded too good to be true.

"The one thing I can say, if you're the EPA administrator, and two lobbyists change the locks, you've got a problem," Mr. Graham said on ABC's "This Week." "The bottom line — this doesn't look good."

President Trump voiced some support for Mr. Pruitt over the weekend, saying he's doing a "great job," that the rent was "about market rate," and that travel expenses were "OK."

"While Security spending was somewhat more than his predecessor, Scott Pruitt has received death threats because of his bold actions at EPA," the president said on Twitter. "Record clean Air & Water while saving USA Billions of Dollars."

On Sunday, Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin said Mr. Pruitt has done a "fantastic" job on policy but declined to weigh in on the alleged ethical lapses.

"I haven't had any direct conversations with the president on this," Mr. Mnuchin said on CBS. "I have obviously had a lot of discussions with him on trade and the economy, but I know he's very supportive of Scott Pruitt's positions and what he's done there."

But Sen. Susan Collins, a Maine Republican who opposed Mr. Pruitt's nomination, said on policy grounds alone he's the wrong person to lead the EPA.

"This daily drip of accusations of excessive spending and ethical violations serve to further distract the agency from accomplishing its very important mission," she said.

"I think Congress needs to do some oversight," she said. "After all, we don't know the extent of the recommendations made by Mr. Pruitt's security team."

Rep. Trey Gowdy, who chairs the House oversight committee, is reportedly looking into Mr. Pruitt's actions.

"I don't have a lot patience for that kind of stuff," the South Carolina Republican said recently in a video posted by Friends of the Earth, an environmental activist group.

Washington Times

<https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/apr/8/mike-rounds-defends-scott-pruitt/>

Sen. Mike Rounds defends EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt amid 'nitpicking'

By David Sherfinski, 4/8/18

Sen. Mike Rounds on Sunday defended Scott Pruitt, the embattled Environmental Protection Agency administrator, saying Mr. Pruitt is following through on President Trump's agenda amid "nitpicking" on other matters.

"He's following through with what the policies the president said he wanted to implement," the South Dakota Republican said on NBC's "Meet the Press."

"In this particular case, Mr. Pruitt has been doing a good job," Mr. Rounds said, saying reports of a series of alleged ethical lapses on the part of Mr. Pruitt could be overblown.

Mr. Pruitt is under fire amid a series of news reports documenting a \$50-a-night deal he secured to rent a Capitol Hill condominium from the wife of an oil industry lobbyist, his use of a security detail for personal use, and the reported punishing of EPA staffers who tried to question some of the department's spending.

"We'll nitpick little things - he has too many people on his security detail," Mr. Rounds said. "It may add up to more than what the previous guy did."

"But what about the big picture of how he's taking care of the taxpayers' dollars with the department, the EPA, and what about the regulations that he said he's going to clean up on that he is?" he said.

Meanwhile Sen. Susan Collins, Maine Republican, said that on policy grounds alone, she thinks Mr. Pruitt is the wrong person to head the EPA.

"This daily drip of accusations of excessive spending and ethical violations serve to further distract the agency from accomplishing its very important mission," Ms. Collins said on CNN's "State of the Union."

The Hill

<http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/382017-ex-gop-lawmaker-if-pruitt-worked-for-obama-everyone-on-fox-news>

Ex-GOP lawmaker: If Pruitt worked for Obama, everyone on Fox News 'would be calling for his head'

By Josh Delk, 4/6/18, 4:53 PM

Former Republican Rep. Joe Walsh (Ill.) said that if Scott Pruitt had been part of former President Obama's administration, the right-leaning Fox News would be calling for his head, as controversies grow surrounding the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) chief.

Pruitt has been beset by scandalous news reports, including allegations of exorbitant spending on his office suite and travel.

Most recently, Pruitt has been in the spotlight over a reported \$50-a-night Capitol Hill condo he rented from the wife of a prominent energy lobbyist.

Multiple congressional Democrats, including House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), have called for Pruitt to resign over the condo deal.

White House chief of staff John Kelly has reportedly told President Trump that Pruitt should go, while Trump has defended the former Oklahoma attorney general, saying Pruitt is "doing a great job" despite being "TOTALLY under siege."

CNN

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/07/politics/al-gore-scott-pruitt-comments/index.html?sr=fbCNNp040718al-gore-scott-pruitt-comments0536PMVODtop&CNNPolitics=fb>

Al Gore: Trump 'ought to fire' Scott Pruitt

By Devan Cole, 4/7/18, 5:29 PM

Former Vice President Al Gore said President Donald Trump should fire Scott Pruitt, the embattled administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

"Donald Trump ought to fire him," Gore said in an interview with CNN's Van Jones on "The Van Jones Show," airing Saturday. "It won't do him any good for me to say that," the former vice president quipped. "But if I told him to keep him on, maybe that would make him fire him."

Pruitt has come under intense scrutiny as a result of being involved in multiple controversies. Recently, he's faced questions about his housing arrangement in Washington, D.C., which involved his renting of a condo co-owned by a lobbyist whose husband works for a firm that has lobbied the EPA on energy issues.

Gore, who won a Nobel Peace Prize in 2007 for his environmental activism, sees Pruitt's scandals as proof of corruption.

"I will tell you that I would be very surprised if 90% of the American people looking at that situation did not think that there was the appearance of outright corruption there," he said.

Stressing the importance of government integrity, Gore told Jones that "regardless of party, regardless of ideology or his policies, the American people have a right to believe there is some modicum of integrity in the way our government is operating."

In their interview, Gore also told Jones that "Putin is a threat" to American democracy and that he "appears to be trying to reverse the outcome of the Cold War." Also a threat, Gore said, is Fox News, Rush Limbaugh and Sinclair Broadcasting Group, which recently came under fire for forcing anchors to read a statement denouncing fake news.

"It had a totalitarian feel to it," Gore said. "There was a specific deal made by Sinclair with someone in the White House giving them special access in return of them parroting the Trump line."

"The main message there is almost like a state-run propaganda channel," he said.

The Hill

<http://thehill.com/homenews/house/382089-trump-shouldnt-fire-pruitt-because-hes-a-great-symbol-of-corruption>

Lieu: Trump shouldn't fire Pruitt because he's a 'great symbol' of corruption

By John Bowden, 4/7/18, 12:27 PM

A Democratic congressman has reversed his call for President Trump to fire Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Scott Pruitt, now saying that Pruitt is a "great symbol" of the Trump administration's corruption and therefore a boon for Democrats.

In a tweet, Rep. Ted Lieu (D-Calif.) called on Trump to not only keep Pruitt on staff at the EPA, but to start bringing the embattled administrator to the president's "toxic" campaign rallies.

"Dear @realDonaldTrump: Dem wave continues to get stronger. So now I'm thinking, please don't fire @EPAScottPruitt. He's such a great symbol of the corruption and fraud, waste & abuse in your Administration," Lieu tweeted.

"Can you please do more toxic rallies & bring Pruitt with you? Thanks," he added.

The tweet came after dozens of House Democrats on Friday to call for Pruitt's resignation over a growing number of scandals, including claims that Pruitt gave large raises to longtime aides against the wishes of the White House and spent millions on his own security detail.

Last week, Lieu became one of the first Democrats to demand Pruitt's firing, accusing him of violating ethics laws.

"Dear @realDonaldTrump: Republicans who don't believe in climate change & want to dismantle environmental protections are a dime a dozen," Lieu tweeted previously. "You don't need @EPAScottPruitt, who spent taxpayer dollars on 1st class travel, violated ethics laws & is deeply paranoid. You should fire him."

Trump met with Pruitt on Friday amid the growing calls for his resignation, but defended the EPA chief in tweets this week saying that he was "doing a great job" despite being "TOTALLY under siege."

The Hill

<http://thehill.com/homenews/senate/382154-collins-pruitt-is-the-wrong-person-to-head-the-epa>

Collins: Pruitt is the wrong person to head the EPA on policy grounds alone

By Rebecca Savransky, 4/8/18, 10:05 AM

Sen. Susan Collins (R-Maine) said Sunday that she doesn't believe Scott Pruitt is the right person to be leading the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

"On policy grounds alone, I think Scott Pruitt is the wrong person to head the EPA," Collins said during an interview on CNN's "State of the Union."

She was pressed on whether she believes Pruitt should resign or be fired.

"That is a position that only the president can take at this point," she said.

Collins also noted she believes Congress needs to do some "oversight" regarding Pruitt's spending.

"This daily drip of accusations of excessive spending and ethical violations served to further distract the agency from accomplishing its very important mission," she said.

Pruitt has been in the spotlight over his spending on frequent first-class travel and full-time security detail.

He was criticized last year after it was reported that the EPA installed a \$43,000 soundproof phone booth in his office, despite there being a similar facility elsewhere in the agency headquarters.

Most recently, Pruitt has come under fire after it was reported that he rented a condo from the wife of an energy lobbyist for \$50 a night, and only on the nights he stayed there.

Some GOP lawmakers have since called for Pruitt to resign.

But President Trump has defended Pruitt, saying he is doing a "great job."

The Hill

<http://thehill.com/homenews/sunday-talk-shows/382156-graham-on-pruitt-ethics-controversies-it-doesnt-look-good>

Graham: Pruitt's ethics controversies don't look good

By Brett Samuels, 4/8/18, 10:20 AM

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.) on Sunday said he believes Scott Pruitt has done a good job, but that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrator's recent slew of ethical controversies "doesn't look good."

"I think he's done a good job, but I'm looking to see what the oversight committee is going to say," Graham said on ABC's "This Week."

"The one thing I can say, if you're the EPA administrator and two lobbyists change the locks, you've got a problem. The bottom line is this doesn't look good," Graham added.

Pruitt has faced intense scrutiny in recent days following reports that he rented a room in a condo owned by the wife of a prominent energy lobbyist during his first several months in D.C. The unit cost him \$50 a day, he only paid for nights that he slept there and his daughter occasionally stayed in the condo as well.

The House Oversight and Government Reform Committee has launched an investigation into the housing arrangement.

In addition, it was reported that Pruitt authorized raises for two of his top staffers despite the White House rejecting the pay increase, and that he cost taxpayers millions of dollars with his security and travel costs.

President Trump defended Pruitt late Saturday, brushing aside the housing controversy and saying the EPA head is "doing a great job."

Reuters

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-epa-democrats/64-democratic-lawmakers-urge-trump-to-dismiss-epa-chief-pruitt-idUSKCN1HD2VQ>

64 Democratic lawmakers urge Trump to dismiss EPA chief Pruitt

4/6/18, 5:05 PM

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Dozens of Democrats in the U.S. House of Representatives on Friday urged President Donald Trump in a letter to ask embattled Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt to resign.

Reps. Don Beyer and David Cicilline led 64 House Democrats in calling for Pruitt's dismissal. The letter said he behaved unethically in renting a room from the wife of an energy lobbyist, wasted taxpayer money, and had taken numerous actions that contravened the EPA's mission, including a trip to Morocco to promote U.S. exports of natural gas. Three Republicans in the 435-member House have called for Pruitt to resign.

Politico

<https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/dozens-of-house-democrats-demand-pruitts-resignation-968706>

Dozens of House Democrats demand Pruitt's resignation

By Anthony Adragna, 4/6/18, 5:00 PM

More than five dozen House Democrats today joined the chorus of voices calling for EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt to resign or be fired amid a stream of ethics problems.

"A man under numerous investigations both for ethical concerns and wasteful spending, who has actively moved to undermine environmental rules and regulations at industry request, is antithetical to the job of EPA Administrator," the lawmakers wrote in their letter, led by Don Beyer of Virginia and David Cicilline of Rhode Island. "Mr. Pruitt needs to go."

The Democrats cited a host of ongoing negative headlines, including Pruitt's \$50-per-night lease in a Capitol Hill condo and lavish use of taxpayer dollars on travel and security, in their demand for his departure. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi called for Pruitt's resignation earlier today.

President Donald Trump voiced support again for his embattled EPA chief earlier today.

Daily Caller

<http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/09/scarborough-republicans-scott-pruitt-epa/>

Scarborough Predicts Republicans 'Will Bleed Support' In November If Trump Doesn't Fire 'Corrupt' Scott Pruitt

By Nick Givas, 4/9/18, 8:46 AM

Joe Scarborough predicted Republicans “will bleed support” in the upcoming midterm elections if President Donald Trump doesn't replace Scott Pruitt as head of the EPA.

Scarborough believes Democrats will be able to make devastating 30-second political ads combining Trump's actions with those of his cabinet.

“Even though Donald Trump can't see it coming, these 30-second ads, the 30-second ads combining what he's done with what Zinke's doing — with what Tom Price is doing. With what Mulvaney's doing,” Scarborough said on “Morning Joe” Monday.

“They may think they can yell fake news — those 30-second ads are going to be so devastating that Republicans are going to bleed support in the fall and they're not going to be able to do anything about it,” he continued.

“Because Donald Trump won't move and fire a corrupt head of the EPA,” Scarborough concluded. “Seriously, Who are these people?”

**Embedded video.*

Daily Caller

<http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/08/dems-epa-scott-pruitt/>

Dems And EPA Insiders Are Freaking Out Over Trump's Refusal To Nix Pruitt

By Chris White, 4/8/18, 3:10 PM

Democratic lawmakers and career officials at the EPA are grasping at straws to understand why President Donald Trump is sticking by one of his most effective lieutenants.

There is a virtual civil war happening inside the EPA as negative reports about agency head Scott Pruitt continue stacking up, agency insiders claim. Capitol Hill Democrats are also not sure how to proceed as Trump dismisses calls to fire the former Oklahoma attorney general.

Democratic California Rep. Ted Lieu, for instance, evolved from calling Pruitt a “deeply paranoid” and “unethical” person who must be fired to advocating Trump's decision might be a good thing for Democrats in the long run.

“So now I'm thinking, please don't fire @EPAScottPruitt,” Lieu wrote Saturday on Twitter shortly before the president reiterated his support for the beleaguered administrator. “He's such a great symbol of the corruption and fraud, waste & abuse in your Administration.” More than 64 of his congressional colleagues disagree: they want him gone.

“Scott Pruitt's unethical behavior, wasteful use of taxpayer money, and his efforts to undermine the EPA's core mission to protect our environmental and public health demand an appropriate response: his resignation or his firing,” a coalition of 64 Democratic representatives wrote in a letter Friday to the president.

Their pleas come after a spate of reports painted Pruitt as a profligate spender of taxpayer money. The New York Times published a report Thursday, for instance, suggesting at least five EPA officials were placed on leave. The officials were reassigned or demoted after opposing spending requests on proposals such as a \$100,000-a-month private jet membership and a bulletproof desk for the armed security officer always stationed inside the administrator's office suite.

Pruitt also reportedly racked up nearly \$90,000 in-flight expenses in June 2017. Pruitt traveled to Italy in June for meetings at the Vatican and to attend a summit with international energy ministers, CBS noted in a Feb. 13 report. The round-trip business-class flight cost at least \$7,000, according to the report. Career bureaucrats at the EPA are joining in the barrage.

"It definitely seems like there's some backstabbing going on," one political appointee, who joined the agency in 2017 after Pruitt became administrator, told Politico Friday about the atmosphere at EPA headquarters. The person added: "Everybody is out for themselves right now."

The atmosphere is like "a slow-motion train wreck at the moment," one career official, who joined the EPA during the Obama-era, told Politico. "I was placing bets he'd (Pruitt) be out by the Fourth of July, but at this rate, he'll be out by the end of the month," another staffer said.

Other career officials are concerned about where the cascade of internal leaks are originating, according to Politico. The recent flurry of reports has relied mostly on anonymous sources. Some of them might be disgruntled former Trump administration officials, according to Inside EPA — an online subscription-based outlet that reports exclusively on EPA-related news.

Former White House official Rob Porter is reportedly one of the leakers, sources told Inside EPA Friday. The leaks were "tit for tat" for EPA senior counsel Samantha Dravis telling White House counsel Don McGahn Porter assaulted his two ex-wives, one source said.

Dravis caught Porter with former White House aide Hope Hicks and kicked him out of the apartment they shared, a second source told Inside EPA. Porter was forced to resign in February and may have leaked information Dravis told him about Pruitt. The reports are a snow-job designed to force the administrator out of the EPA, some suggest.

EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox dismissed such apocalyptic talk. "That's false," he told Politico. "It's been a team effort from the beginning, and the hardworking staff at EPA is unified and committed to advancing President Trump's agenda of regulatory certainty and environmental stewardship."

But any bets Pruitt is out the door soon will have to be hedged. Trump does not appear willing to jettison his top EPA guy just yet. The president voiced his support for Pruitt during a Thursday White House press gaggle, telling reporters: "I think he's done a fantastic job. I think he's done an incredible job." Trump doubled down on those comments in a tweet Saturday evening, telling his followers, "Scott is doing a great job!"

Perhaps one of the main reasons for the president's loyalty is Pruitt's effectiveness. He successfully nixed the Clean Power Plan, convinced Trump to leave the Paris climate agreement, and more recently, crafted new, less-burdensome, greenhouse gas emission and mileage standards for vehicles to be built in 2022 through 2025.

Pruitt has almost single-handedly decommissioned former President Barack Obama's entire environmental agenda.

Pruitt moved to undo, delay or block, more than 30 environmental regulations during the first few months of his tenure, which began in January 2017. The rollbacks were more than any other administrator in the agency's 47-year history over such a short period of time, according to a February 2017 report from The New York Times.

The Hill

<http://thehill.com/blogs/in-the-know/in-the-know/382265-john-oliver-even-mickey-mouse-would-tell-pruitt-to-go-f>

John Oliver: Even Mickey Mouse would tell Pruitt to 'go f--- himself'

By Morgan Gstalter, 4/9/18, 11:15 AM

Comedian John Oliver ripped Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt on Sunday's "Last Week Tonight" for bringing his security detail to Disneyland, saying even Mickey Mouse would tell Pruitt to "go f--- himself."

Pruitt has been accused of wasteful spending by bringing his official security detail with him on nonofficial trips to Disneyland and a Rose Bowl game.

"I'm a little torn on this one because on the one hand that does seem wasteful," Oliver said. "But on the other hand, if anyone needs security at Disneyland, it's Scott Pruitt — a man who even Mickey and Minnie Mouse would tell to go f--- himself"

Oliver mocked Pruitt's stance on climate change and global warming, saying "Space Mountain's going to be underwater in 10 years, you son of a bitch."

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.) wrote a letter to the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) inspector general (IG) last week demanding an investigation into Pruitt's spending.

The IG is already reviewing Pruitt's travel expenses and use of security.

EPA documents and sources revealed that the agency spent about \$3 million on a 20-person, full-time security detail and travel expenses for Pruitt, according to a new analysis on Sunday.

Oliver also ripped Pruitt for renting a room owned by an energy lobbyist's wife for \$50 a night.

"Which for the the whole 'Drain the Swamp' administration, is particularly hard to take," Oliver said.

Pruitt said he was "dumbfounded" that people found the move controversial, saying the rental agreement did not constitute as a gift and was within the EPA's ethics guidelines.

New York Times

https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/07/climate/scott-pruitt-epa-rollbacks.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FEnvironmental%20Protection%20Agency&action=click&contentCollection=timestopics®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=1&pgtype=collection

In His Haste to Roll Back Rules, Scott Pruitt, E.P.A. Chief, Risks His Agenda

By Coral Davenport and Lisa Friedman, 4/7/18

WASHINGTON — As ethical questions threaten the Environmental Protection Agency administrator, Scott Pruitt, President Trump has defended him with a persuasive conservative argument: Mr. Pruitt is doing a great job at what he was hired to do, roll back regulations.

But legal experts and White House officials say that in Mr. Pruitt's haste to undo government rules and in his eagerness to hold high-profile political events promoting his agenda, he has often been less than rigorous in following important procedures, leading to poorly crafted legal efforts that risk being struck down in court.

The result, they say, is that the rollbacks, intended to fulfill one of the president's central campaign pledges, may ultimately be undercut or reversed.

"In their rush to get things done, they're failing to dot their i's and cross their t's. And they're starting to stumble over a lot of trip wires," said Richard Lazarus, a professor of environmental law at Harvard. "They're producing a lot of short, poorly crafted rulemakings that are not likely to hold up in court."

Six of Mr. Pruitt's efforts to delay or roll back Obama-era regulations — on issues including pesticides, lead paint and renewable-fuel requirements — have been struck down by the courts. Mr. Pruitt also backed down on a proposal to delay implementing smog regulations and another to withdraw a regulation on mercury pollution.

The courts, for instance, found that the E.P.A. had ignored clear legal statutes when they ruled that Mr. Pruitt had illegally delayed a regulation curbing methane emissions from new oil and gas wells and that the agency had broken the law by missing a deadline last year to enact ozone restrictions.

In other cases — including one in which a federal court ordered the E.P.A. to act on a Connecticut request to reduce pollution from a Pennsylvania power plant, and one where judges demanded quick action from the agency on new lead paint standards — the courts warned Mr. Pruitt that avoiding enacting regulations already on the books was an inappropriate effort to repeal a rule without justifying the action.

"The E.P.A. has a clear duty to act," a panel of judges of the San Francisco-based Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit wrote in a 2-1 decision finding that the agency must revise its lead paint standards in 90 days, as regulations required. The agency had tried to delay the revisions for six years.

In an interview on Friday, the White House spokeswoman, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, said that Mr. Trump felt that Mr. Pruitt had done a satisfactory job at the EPA. Her comments suggested that Mr. Pruitt's work checking off items on the president's agenda — including rolling back a large number of environmental protections — may weigh heavily as a counterbalance to the ethics questions related to his travel expenses, management practices and his rental of a living space from the wife of a prominent lobbyist.

Describing Mr. Trump's view of Mr. Pruitt, she said: "He likes the work product."

@realDonaldTrump

While Security spending was somewhat more than his predecessor, Scott Pruitt has received death threats because of his bold actions at EPA. Record clean Air & Water while saving USA Billions of Dollars. Rent was about market rate, travel expenses OK. Scott is doing a great job!

Liz Bowman, an E.P.A. spokeswoman, disputed the criticisms of the agency's work. "E.P.A. does its due diligence, consults with O.M.B. and other federal agencies to ensure that its work is legally defensible," she said in an email, referring to the Office of Management and Budget, the office that coordinates and evaluates policy across the executive branch.

One of the chief examples cited by Mr. Pruitt's critics came this week when the E.P.A. filed its legal justification for what is arguably the largest rollback of an environmental rule in the Trump administration: the proposed undoing of an Obama-era regulation aimed at cutting pollution of planet-warming greenhouse gases from vehicle tailpipes.

Mr. Pruitt made his case for the rollback in a 38-page document filed on Tuesday that, experts say, was devoid of the kind of supporting legal, scientific and technical data that courts have shown they expect to see when considering challenges to regulatory changes.

"There's an incredible lack of numbers," said James McCargar, a former senior policy analyst at the E.P.A. who worked on vehicle emissions programs and remains in close touch with career staffers who work on those programs. "If this gets challenged in court, I just don't see how they provide anything that gives a technical justification to undo the rule."

The rules Mr. Pruitt is targeting would require automakers to nearly double the average fuel economy of passenger vehicles to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025. Automakers have argued the rule is onerous, forcing them to invest heavily in building hybrid and electric vehicles.

As part of the process, Mr. Pruitt filed the 38-page document, which is meant to supply the government's legal justification for rolling back the rule. About half the document consists of quotations from automakers laying out their objections to the rule. By comparison, the Obama administration's 1,217-page document justifying its implementation of the regulation included technical, scientific and economic analyses justifying the rule.

Experts in environmental policy said the lack of analytical arguments in this week's E.P.A. filing surprised them. "This document is unprecedented," said Mr. McCargar, the former E.P.A. senior policy analyst. "The E.P.A. has just never done anything like this."

John M. DeCicco, a professor of engineering and public policy at the University of Michigan Energy Institute, said the filing was a departure from the practices of previous Republican and Democratic administrations.

"A president or an administrator or somebody can't just say, 'I'm going to change the rule,' without justifying it very, very carefully," Mr. DeCicco said. "As a scientist who's worked on these issues, I'm saying, where are the numbers? Where's the data?"

Most of the document consists of arguments quoting directly from public comments made by automaker lobbyists, the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers and the Global Automakers, that the pollution rules will be unduly burdensome on the auto industry, as well as public comments from Toyota, Fiat Chrysler, Mercedes-Benz and Mitsubishi.

While it does include arguments opposing the regulatory rollback from groups including the Union of Concerned Scientists and the state of California, it does not contain what environmental experts say is the critical element of a legally strong justification for changing an E.P.A. regulation: Technical analysis of both sides of the argument leading to a conclusion aimed at persuading a judge that the change is defensible.

Seth Michaels, a spokesman for the Union of Concerned Scientists, suggested that, in its reuse of arguments by the automakers' lobby, the emissions-rollback document echoed Mr. Pruitt's modus operandi when he was the Oklahoma Attorney General.

"It's reminiscent of the 2011 letter Scott Pruitt sent as Oklahoma AG to the E.P.A., in which he took a letter drafted by lawyers for Devon Energy and stuck his name on it with minimal edits," Mr. Michaels said.

A 2014 investigation by The Times found that lobbyists for Devon Energy, an Oklahoma oil and gas company, drafted letters for Mr. Pruitt to send to the E.P.A., the Interior Department, the Office of Management and Budget and President Obama, outlining the economic hardship of various environmental rules.

Between 2011 and 2017, Mr. Pruitt filed suit against the E.P.A. 14 times, and lost almost all of the cases.

Most were filed in conjunction with the Republican attorneys general of a dozen or more other states, making it difficult to know precisely which legal arguments his office contributed, legal experts said. Mr. Pruitt frequently took a lead role in the cases.

In the end, "a lot of those arguments were losers," said Richard L. Revesz, an expert in environmental law at New York University.

In particular, Mr. Revesz noted a case brought by the group against President Obama's signature climate change regulation, the Clean Power Plan, which Mr. Pruitt is now working to overturn from within the E.P.A. The lawsuit

challenged a draft proposal of the regulation, which was an unprecedented move that a federal court quickly struck down, saying that they could not legally challenge a draft.

While the attorneys general, including Mr. Pruitt, garnered media attention for the case, “The argument they had was ludicrous,” Mr. Revesz said.

The group did, however, score one major victory: After the Obama administration issued its final version of the Clean Power Plan, it successfully petitioned the Supreme Court to temporarily halt implementation of the rule.

Since taking the helm of E.P.A., Mr. Pruitt has barnstormed the country, meeting with farmers, coal miners and local leaders and promising an end to his predecessor’s regulatory approach. He also has favored closed-door policy speeches to conservative think tanks, like the Heritage Foundation, to roll out policy initiatives.

The Heritage Foundation was the venue Mr. Pruitt chose this year to say that he would make changes to how scientific studies are considered at the agency. Both critics and supporters of Mr. Pruitt said that, by making the proposal in a political fashion rather than changing the rules in a quieter but potentially more lasting way means that changes like these are more vulnerable to being undone by a future administration.

Environmental groups have welcomed Mr. Pruitt’s court losses. Joanne Spalding, chief climate counsel for the Sierra Club, said she was pleased by what she called “sloppy” and “careless” E.P.A. legal work. “It’s fine with us,” she said. “Do a bad job repealing these things, because then we get to go to court and win.”

Thomas J. Pyle, a supporter of Mr. Pruitt’s and the president of the Institute for Energy Research, a think tank that promotes fossil fuels, described that as spin. “The environmental left portrays Scott Pruitt as a devil incarnate in their fund-raising solicitations, yet brag about how ineffective he is in dismantling Obama’s climate rules,” he said. “Which is it?”

Still, some conservatives said they were worried that Mr. Pruitt was more interested in media attention than policy and feared more legal losses. “If the goal is to generate temporary relief and to make a splash, then what they’re doing is terrifically fine,” said Jonathan H. Adler, director of the Center for Business Law & Regulation at Case Western Reserve University School of Law.

But if the Trump administration wants to permanently change the regulatory environment for business, he said, the E.P.A. cannot take such a “quick and dirty approach” to unraveling regulations. “I’m suspicious that two, three years down the road there’s going to be much to show for all the fireworks we’re getting now,” Mr. Adler said.

AP

https://apnews.com/e2fdc3fe88be432792817795a34fda46?utm_campaign=SocialFlow&utm_source=Twitter&utm_medium=AP

AP sources: EPA chief spent millions on security and travel

By Michael Biesecker, 4/7/18

WASHINGTON (AP) — Environmental Protection Agency chief Scott Pruitt’s concern with his safety came at a steep cost to taxpayers as his swollen security detail blew through overtime budgets and at times diverted officers away from investigating environmental crimes.

Altogether, the agency spent millions of dollars for a 20-member full-time detail that is more than three times the size of his predecessor’s part-time security contingent.

New details in Pruitt's expansive spending for security and travel emerged from agency sources and documents reviewed by The Associated Press. They come as the embattled EPA leader fends off allegations of profligate spending and ethical missteps that have imperiled his job.

Shortly after arriving in Washington, Pruitt demoted the career staff member heading his security detail and replaced him with EPA Senior Special Agent Pasquale "Nino" Perrotta, a former Secret Service agent who operates a private security company.

An EPA official with direct knowledge of Pruitt's security spending says Perrotta oversaw a rapid expansion of the EPA chief's security detail to accommodate guarding him day and night, even on family vacations and when Pruitt was home in Oklahoma. The EPA official spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation.

Perrotta also signed off on new procedures that let Pruitt fly first-class on commercial airliners, with the security chief typically sitting next to him with other security staff farther back in the plane. Pruitt's premium status gave him and his security chief access to VIP airport lounges.

The EPA official said there are legitimate concerns about Pruitt's safety, given public opposition to his rollbacks of anti-pollution measures.

But Pruitt's ambitious domestic and international travel led to rapidly escalating costs, with the security detail racking up so much overtime that many hit annual salary caps of about \$160,000. The demands of providing 24-hour coverage even meant taking some investigators away from field work, such as when Pruitt traveled to California for a family vacation.

The EPA official said total security costs approached \$3 million when pay is added to travel expenses.

EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox said late Friday that Pruitt has faced an "unprecedented" amount of death threats against him and his family.

"Americans should all agree that members of the President's cabinet should be kept safe from these violent threats," Wilcox said.

A nationwide search of state and federal court records by AP found no case where anyone has been arrested or charged with threatening Pruitt. EPA's press office did not respond Friday to provide details of any specific threats or arrests.

Pruitt has said his use of first-class airfare was initiated following unpleasant interactions with other travelers. In one incident, someone yelled a profanity as he walked through the airport.

The EPA administrator has come under intense scrutiny for ethics issues and outsized spending. Among the concerns: massive raises for two of closest aides and his rental of a Capitol Hill condo tied to a lobbyist who represents fossil fuel clients.

At least three congressional Republicans and a chorus of Democrats have called for Pruitt's ouster. But President Donald Trump is so far standing by him.

A review of Pruitt's ethical conduct by White House officials is underway, adding to probes by congressional oversight committees and EPA's inspector general.

Pruitt, 49, was closely aligned with the oil and gas industry as Oklahoma's state attorney general before being tapped by Trump. Trump has praised Pruitt's relentless efforts to scrap, delay or rewrite Obama-era environmental regulations. He also has championed budget cuts and staff reductions at the agency so deep that even Republican budget hawks in Congress refused to implement them.

EPA's press office has refused to disclose the cost of Pruitt's security or the size of his protective detail, saying doing so could imperil his personal safety.

But other sources within EPA and documents released through public information requests help provide a window into the ballooning costs.

In his first three months in office, before pricey overseas trips to Italy and Morocco, the price tag for Pruitt's security detail hit more than \$832,000, according to EPA documents released through a public information request.

Nearly three dozen EPA security and law enforcement agents were assigned to Pruitt, according to a summary of six weeks of weekly schedules obtained by Democratic Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island.

Those schedules show multiple EPA security agents accompanied Pruitt on a family vacation to California that featured a day at Disneyland and a New Year's Day football game where his home state Oklahoma Sooners were playing in the Rose Bowl. Multiple agents also accompanied Pruitt to a baseball game at the University of Kentucky and at his house outside Tulsa, during which no official EPA events were scheduled.

On weekend trips home for Sooners football games, when taxpayers weren't paying for his ticket, the EPA official said Pruitt flew coach. He sometimes used a companion pass obtained with frequent flyer miles accumulated by Ken Wagner, a former law partner whom Pruitt hired as a senior adviser at EPA at a salary of more than \$172,000. Taxpayers still covered the airfare for the administrator's security detail.

Pruitt's predecessor, Gina McCarthy, had a security detail that numbered about a half dozen, less than a third the size of Pruitt's. She flew coach and was not accompanied by security during her off hours, like on weekend trips home to Boston.

Pruitt was accompanied by nine aides and a security detail during a trip to Italy in June that cost more than \$120,000. He visited the U.S. Embassy in Rome and took a private tour of the Vatican before briefly attending a meeting of G-7 environmental ministers in Bologna.

Private Italian security guards hired by Perrotta helped arrange an expansive motorcade for Pruitt and his entourage, according to the EPA official with direct knowledge of the trip. The source described the Italian additions as personal friends of Perrotta, who joined Pruitt and his EPA staff for an hours-long dinner at an upscale restaurant.

Perrotta's biography, on the website of his company, Sequoia Security Group, says that during his earlier stint with the Secret Service he worked with the Guardia di Finanza, the Italian finance police.

The EPA spent nearly \$9,000 last year on increased counter-surveillance precautions for Pruitt, including hiring a private contractor to sweep his office for hidden listening devices and installing sophisticated biometric locks for the doors. The payment for the bug sweep went to a vice president at Perrotta's security company.

The EPA official who spoke to AP said Perrotta also arranged the installation of a \$43,000 soundproof phone booth for Pruitt's office.

At least five EPA officials were placed on leave, reassigned or demoted after pushing back against spending requests such as a \$100,000-a-month private jet membership, a bulletproof vehicle and \$70,000 for furniture such as a bulletproof desk for the armed security officer always stationed inside the administrator's office suite.

Those purchases were not approved. But Pruitt got an ornate refurbished desk comparable in grandeur to the one in the Oval Office.

Among the officials who faced consequences for resisting such spending was EPA Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations Kevin Chmielewski, a former Trump campaign staffer who was placed on unpaid administrative leave this year.

The prior head of Pruitt's security detail, Eric Weese, was demoted last year after he refused Pruitt's demand to use the lights and sirens on his government-owned SUV to get him through Washington traffic to the airport and dinner reservations.

New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/06/us/politics/scott-pruitt-security-furniture.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FEnvironmental%20Protection%20Agency>

Scott Pruitt's Wish List: Private Jets, Fancy Furniture, 24-Hour Security

By Liam Stack, 4/6/18

Scott Pruitt, the administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, has been under fire for his extravagant spending on things like office furniture and private jet travel.

But President Trump has resisted calls, including from John F. Kelly, his chief of staff, to fire Mr. Pruitt, who appears to have punished or pushed out five agency officials who attempted to rein in his spending.

Here are some of the big-ticket items Mr. Pruitt, a former Oklahoma attorney general, wanted — some of which he got.

Private Jets and First-Class Airfare

Mr. Pruitt's team wanted to buy a \$100,000-a-month charter aircraft membership that would let him take an unlimited number of trips in a private jet when he was traveling for official business.

An aide objected and the membership was not purchased, but even without it Mr. Pruitt spent an unusually large amount on travel.

He regularly flies first class and has had trips specially routed so he could spend time at a home he owns in Oklahoma.

Two weeks of travel for him and his aides cost taxpayers more than \$120,000 last June, and in December he took aides on a five-day, \$40,000 trip to Morocco.

Once, he spent \$5,719 on a 40-minute private jet flight from Denver to Durango, Colo. He did not request approval for the flight until after he had already taken it.

Expensive Furniture, Some of It Bulletproof

Mr. Pruitt's head of security wanted to spend about \$70,000 to replace two desks in his office suite, one with a bulletproof model. An aide objected and the bulletproof desk was not purchased, but two other expensive desks were.

One was a brown maple wood stand-up desk, with brass locks, that was purchased from a craftsman. The second was an oversize desk with decorative woodworking that some E.P.A. employees compared to the Resolute Desk in the Oval Office. Mr. Pruitt had it refurbished for \$2,075.

Mr. Pruitt expanded his security detail to 20 members, almost three times as many as guarded his predecessor under President Obama, Gina McCarthy. Unlike Ms. McCarthy, Mr. Pruitt also ordered his security detail to work overnight and to follow him wherever he went.

Mr. Pruitt's team also wanted to be issued a bulletproof sport utility vehicle with so-called run flat tires, which allow a vehicle to keep moving even when its tires have been hit by gunfire.

The bulletproof S.U.V. was not purchased. Instead, a regular S.U.V. was retrofitted with some protective features.

A Flashy Motorcade

Mr. Pruitt, who has a reputation for running late, wanted to use flashing lights and sirens with his motorcade so he could travel across Washington faster. Some of the trips were to the airport, but at least one took him to Le Diplomate, a trendy French restaurant in an upscale neighborhood.

A motorcade with flashing lights and sirens is a traffic-stopping perk usually associated with the presidency, and using one to go to a fancy restaurant is not consistent with E.P.A. policy.

An Office Security Booth

Mr. Pruitt wanted to build a special security booth in his office so he could have conversations without being overheard by E.P.A. employees.

An aide suggested turning a broom closet into a secure room at a cost of \$10,000 but Pasquale Perrotta, a new security chief at the E.P.A. whose immediate predecessor had objected to Mr. Pruitt's spending, shot down that idea.

Mr. Perrotta wanted a more elaborate chamber that included technology that would keep voice or data transmissions from being intercepted. In the end it cost almost \$43,000.

"He wanted to be treated like he was the president," said David Schnare, a prominent conservative lawyer and climate change skeptic, who served on the Trump administration transition team at the E.P.A., after an earlier 30-year stint at the agency that started in the late 1970s.

Politico

<https://www.politicopro.com/agriculture/article/2018/04/inside-the-epa-its-just-a-slow-motion-trainwreck-467487>

Inside the EPA: 'It's just a slow-motion trainwreck'

By Emily Holden, 4/6/18, 5:29 PM

Environmental Protection Agency employees are talking about "backstabbing" and "civil war," worrying about leaks or wondering whether to leak, pondering quitting while fearing that the mushrooming scandals surrounding Administrator Scott Pruitt will make it impossible for them to find a job.

And they've spent the past week facing an onslaught of media inquiries into rumors that, if true, might nudge the White House to push Pruitt out the door.

The internal EPA drama is infecting even Pruitt's inner circle, which has been split for months between D.C.-based Republicans and some loyalists who followed him from his former post as Oklahoma attorney general — a few of whom, according to two former staffers, have been all too eager to sign off on the luxe travel and security spending that has spurred growing calls for President Donald Trump to fire their boss.

"It appears that the leadership at EPA is coming apart at the seams," Rep. Elijah Cummings (D-Md.) wrote in a letter this week asking the House Oversight Committee to subpoena Pruitt's spending records.

That's an accurate assessment, POLITICO has learned after speaking to eight current and two former EPA staffers and an 11th former Trump appointee elsewhere in the administration. None of them were willing to be quoted by name, for fear of jeopardizing their jobs and dragging themselves into the headlines. Though the employees differ on many of the details, the picture they painted portrays an agency in chaos.

"It's just a slow-motion trainwreck at the moment," said one staffer who has worked with the agency since the Obama administration.

"It definitely seems like there's some backstabbing going on," said one political appointee, who joined the agency last year after Pruitt became administrator. The person added, "Everybody is out for themselves right now."

EPA spokesman Jahan Wilcox disputed that the agency is in turmoil.

"That's false. It's been a team effort from the beginning, and the hardworking staff at EPA is unified and committed to advancing President Trump's agenda of regulatory certainty and environmental stewardship," he said in an email.

Career staffers said morale was at an all-time low. "Nobody wants to be under fire, nobody wants their agency to be under fire — they want the agency to succeed," said yet another employee. "Some folks are absolutely having a hard time with it."

A different EPA employee said this past week's spree of embarrassing headlines — from Pruitt's \$50-a-day condo deal to proposals for bulletproof desks and \$100,000-a-month jet rentals — has accelerated internal speculation about how long until the administrator loses his job.

"I was placing bets he'd be out by the 4th of July, but at this rate he'll be out by the end of the month," the staffer said. (In fact, as of Thursday, at least one website lets people bet on how long Pruitt will last.)

That decision will be up to Trump, who has praised Pruitt in public for doing a "fantastic job" even as his aides — including chief of staff John Kelly — have expressed increasing alarm at the EPA leader's inability to stay out of trouble.

But in fact, another staffer said, employees suspect that Pruitt and his team are spending little time these days carrying out Trump's policy agenda.

"We know the bosses, at least the administrator's office, has zero bandwidth to be dealing with any policy issues right now," the staffer said. "There's no way on earth they're going to worry about any detail of what we're working on. ... It's a little hard to push ahead on deregulatory actions while the guy who's driving them seems to be going out the door."

Among employees, that staffer added, the Pruitt scandal has come to dominate the workplace: Every hour, it seemed, someone would pop in to the room to announce the latest breaking story. Other agency veterans frequently checked news sites and social media for updates while trading stories, real or not, of senior staffers slamming doors and having yelling matches over the weekend and throughout the week.

EPA's career employees were starting to feel fatigue over the "scandalous activities going on in D.C. by our boss," said Mike Mikulka, president of American Federation of Government Employees Local 704, which represents about 900 unionized workers in EPA's Chicago office.

Workers are especially incensed by Pruitt's spending habits, including first-class travel and his secure phone booth, when Pruitt also pushes Congress to slash EPA's budget and workforce. "He's blowing money like there's no tomorrow, spending money like it's water, and at the same time we can't even hire somebody to do a job that we need done," Mikulka said.

Among Pruitt's political employees, meanwhile, people are caught up in speculation about the source of leaks that could end careers.

Multiple sources familiar with the dynamic at EPA suggested that the agency's leadership has been split into factions for months, recently heating up into a "civil war."

Key EPA officials — many of whom joined the agency from Washington GOP political jobs or after working for Sen. Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) — appeared frustrated with some of the inner circle of aides who followed Pruitt from his former job.

Those staffers and leaders of Pruitt's security detail have been eager to please the administrator and were less likely to push back on some of his travel and security arrangements, two former employees close to the situation said.

"It's an environment in which people either feel that their work relies on spending time with the administrator, placating the administrator, doing his bidding or just allowing him to do whatever while [they are] focusing on the policy stuff," said one past staffer who has continued to hear about the situation from current EPA officials.

Media-grabbing stories about Pruitt's first-class flights, expensive security arrangements and condo rental from a lobbyist have "frustrated efforts to carry out Trump's reform agenda, [which has been] stymied by personal conflicts of this administrator and his coterie of enablers," the source said.

Big raises to Pruitt's closest aides and allegations that his policy chief has been allowed to take months off of work have further irritated the situation, as have news stories that Pruitt had pushed out dissenting employees and tried to use his security detail's sirens to speed through D.C. traffic to a trendy French restaurant.

Employees who have been drawn into signing off on Pruitt's expenses, or who are on the front lines defending him to the news media, are frustrated — and some have considered resigning, according to the second former staffer. That person noted getting calls from one current employee looking for an exit but worried about job opportunities if the headlines get worse, and from others who were weighing whether it was time to air their own grievances via the media.

The leaks have spawned their own form of palace intrigue.

One administration source speaking to POLITICO has tried to pin the leaks on a disgruntled departed employee, while an EPA-specific trade publication alleged that some were coming from Rob Porter, a former Trump aide who was fired over reports of domestic abuse. The New York Times cited sources close to EPA chief of staff Ryan Jackson who said he had considered resigning, and Sen. Tom Carper (D-Del.), in a letter to EPA's inspector general, contended that soon-to-exit policy chief Samantha Dravis hadn't shown up at work "for much if not all of the months of November 2017-January 2018." EPA called that letter "baseless and absurd," saying Dravis "has performed her duties faithfully for her entire tenure."

Pruitt himself has either claimed that none of his actions are questionable or pushed responsibility onto staffers below him, including for the recent raises that EPA had granted to two of his political aides over the opposition of the White House. On Thursday, he took a break from media appearances and was in Kentucky speaking about regulatory reform at a meeting of conservative state and local air agencies.

On Friday morning, the president appeared to take his side, tweeting that Pruitt "is doing a great job but is TOTALLY under siege." But that didn't mean Pruitt's job is safe.

In the business community Pruitt regulates, few have publicly come to his aid, although some are backing up his policy record when asked.

"I don't have any thoughts about the headlines," Paul Bailey, CEO of the American Coalition for Clean Coal Electricity, said at the start of an interview Thursday. "We think Pruitt has done a really, really, really effective job policy-wise at EPA."

A group of prominent conservatives in a letter to the White House on Friday also thanked the president for sticking with Pruitt, saying that his policy accomplishments override his controversies. Shortly later, 64 House Democrats followed Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and called for Pruitt to step down.

The scandals that have sucked up the attention of D.C. politicians and media have also started to weary the normal populace.

A woman living in a Capitol Hill apartment next to the one Pruitt rented for \$50 a night, in a neighborhood swarming with reporters this week, made it a point to tell one journalist that that story is over: "He *used* to live here."

BNA

http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/display/no_alpha.adp?mode=si&frag_id=131340728&item=408&prod=deln&cat=AGENCY

Superfund Sites Just Got More Appealing for Developers

By Sylvia Carignan, 4/9/18

Superfund sites may become more appealing to developers as a result of EPA's latest effort to push the contaminated sites toward reuse.

The Environmental Protection Agency now may use chunks of its \$3.3 billion in special accounts to persuade companies to buy and clean up Superfund sites. The change could push more Superfund sites toward redevelopment, since those purchasers' efforts could also prepare sites for future uses, attorneys told Bloomberg Environment.

"If you're a developer interested in one of these, you may be intrigued by the notion," John Gullace, partner at Manko, Gold, Katcher & Fox LLP, told Bloomberg Environment. Gullace has represented companies involved with Superfund sites.

The EPA maintains special accounts for each site. Those accounts bear interest and accumulate funds from actions such as settlements with polluting companies. Special account funds have been used to pay for cleanup and to persuade companies that are potentially liable for pollution to clean up sites.

New agency [guidance](#), signed March 27, expands the uses of those funds to persuade prospective site purchasers, who have not caused pollution at a site, to start cleaning it up.

Those monetary incentives could range from tens of thousands to millions of dollars, depending on the site, David Mears, professor and director of the Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic at Vermont Law School, told Bloomberg Environment.

Sites on EPA's National Priorities List, also known as Superfund sites, are the most contaminated in the country. Sites on the list include the Gowanus Canal in New York, Portland Harbor in Oregon and Tar Creek in Oklahoma.

Special Accounts

There is about \$3.3 billion in EPA's Superfund site special accounts as of this week, about three times the amount Congress has appropriated to the Superfund program for fiscal year 2018.

About \$1 billion of the money in Superfund special accounts is from a [2014 settlement](#) with Tronox, Inc. to address more than 50 abandoned uranium mines on and near Navajo Nation land, according to the agency.

The agency prefers to use special account funding at sites where companies can be compelled to pay for cleanup. At abandoned sites or those where companies are unable to pay for cleanup, the EPA uses Congressionally-appropriated funds.

Regional EPA offices must consult with the remediation enforcement office at agency headquarters before regional offices may pay funds out of the special account.

The value of a redeveloped property often provides the financial incentive for a potential buyer to take on a contaminated site, Peter Hsiao, partner at Morrison Foerster in Los Angeles, told Bloomberg Environment. But in some

cases, for example where sites are in depressed real estate markets, special account funds could expedite cleanup and productive reuse, he said.

“It will be interesting to see how EPA proposes to equitably distribute those funds and what strings it may attach to their use,” Hsiao said in an email. His practice includes Superfund law.

The updated guidance was one of more than three dozen recommendations the agency's Superfund task force made last year. Attorneys told Bloomberg Environment the guidance is consistent with EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's effort to redevelop Superfund sites.

Elliott Gilberg, former director of EPA's Superfund enforcement office, told Bloomberg Environment the guidance seems to be a “reasonable use” of special account funds.

Politico

<https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2018/04/07/scott-pruitt-epa-accomplishments-rollback-217834>

The Myth of Scott Pruitt's EPA Rollback

By Michael Grunwald, 4/7/18

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt's spiraling ethics scandals and perilous job status were big news this week, but he also made headlines with his latest assault on President Barack Obama's environmental legacy. “Pruitt Announces Rollback of Obama-Era Auto Fuel Efficiency Rule,” ABC News reported. “EPA's Pruitt Kills Obama's Auto Rules,” the Washington Examiner put it. The New York Times analyzed how the furor over Pruitt's behavior has overshadowed his triumphs over regulation: “For Scott Pruitt, a Spotlight Shines on His Ethics, Not His EPA Rollbacks.”

But Pruitt did not kill or roll back Obama's strict fuel-efficiency standards; he merely announced his intention to launch a process that could eventually weaken them. In fact, Pruitt has not yet killed or rolled back any significant regulations that were in place when President Donald Trump took office. While Pruitt is often hailed (or attacked) as Trump's most effective (or destructive) deregulatory warrior, the recent spotlight on his ethics—allegations of a sweetheart housing deal; pay raises for favored aides; lavish spending on travel, furniture and security; and retaliation against underlings who questioned him—has arguably overshadowed his lack of regulatory rollbacks during his first 15 months in Washington. The truth is that Scott Pruitt has done a lot less to dismantle the EPA than he—or his critics—would have you believe.

It's not for lack of trying. Pruitt has taken aim at just about every major Obama-era EPA rule, which has made him a pariah on the left, a hero on the right and the bureaucratic face of Trump's vocal advocacy for fossil-fuel interests and other industrial polluters. But so far he's only managed to delay a few rules that hadn't yet taken effect. His supporters, critics and boss have all promoted the perception that he's repealed Obama's environmental legacy and shredded America's environmental rulebook—and no one has promoted that perception more energetically than Pruitt, who frequently sued Obama's EPA when he was Oklahoma's attorney general. Nevertheless, that perception is wrong.

Pruitt's problem is that major federal regulations are extremely difficult and time-consuming to enact, and just as difficult and time-consuming to reverse. The rulemaking process can take years of technical and administrative work that Pruitt and his team have not yet had time to do. And even if Pruitt manages to keep his job long enough to complete that process for any of his efforts to weaken clean-air and clean-water rules, the EPA will inevitably face years of litigation over each one. The old saying that it's easier to tear down a barn than to build one does not really apply to rules limiting pollutants like ozone, coal ash, mercury and methane.

“The regulatory apparatus is like a super-tanker; it can take a long time to turn around,” says Washington appellate lawyer David Rivkin, who represented Pruitt in several of Oklahoma’s challenges to Obama-era EPA rules. “If you want durable results, you can’t be sloppy or rushed.”

In Washington, Pruitt and his aggressive press shop have cultivated his reputation for relentlessness and effectiveness, portraying him as a man on a mission who knows how to get things done. And despite all the bad press over his ethical woes, his defenders and haters almost always describe him as successful. GQ grudgingly noted that “in a Cabinet that doesn’t get much done, Pruitt has been dangerously effective,” while the friendly Wall Street Journal editorial page gushed that “if there has been a more consequential Cabinet official, we haven’t seen him.”

It’s true that Pruitt has had some success transforming how the EPA pursues its mission, communicates with the public and enforces its rules. He has used his discretionary powers to give factories more deference when they apply for permits, states more control of their air quality compliance, and industry-friendly officials more sway on EPA’s science advisory boards. He’s sent a clear message throughout the agency to be more accommodating to businesses, a message that has helped persuade hundreds of its career public servants to retire. And he has abruptly halted the EPA’s focus on combating climate change, its top priority in the Obama years. He was the leading internal advocate for Trump to withdraw from the Paris climate accord, although the withdrawal won’t take effect until November 2020, so it probably won’t stick if Trump doesn’t get reelected.

So far, though, Pruitt has yet to create new regulations that would outlast his tenure or Trump’s, or to rescind any of the regulations Obama created. He’s only been able to delay a few that were already on hold before he took office because they were mired in litigation—most notably Obama’s rules protecting wetlands from development and limiting carbon emissions from power plants. He’s vowed to repeal and replace them both, but he’s barely begun those processes. He’s also managed to block a few Obama proposals that had not yet taken effect—like a ban on the pesticide chlorpyrifos, which the EPA had found posed a risk to fetal brain development, and a rule requiring sewage plants to reduce toxic emissions.

But the EPA rules that were in effect in 2016 are still the rules in 2018, despite Pruitt’s efforts to overturn them. He tried to impose a unilateral stay on an Obama rule regulating climate-warming methane emissions from oil and gas operations; a federal appeals court deemed the stay “unauthorized” and “unreasonable,” so the methane rule is now in force again. He tried a similar maneuver to suspend Obama’s restrictions on smog; after a group of state attorney generals sued, Pruitt reversed course, so those restrictions also remain in effect. Obama’s EPA had worked on both rules for years, engaging with stakeholders and the scientific community, creating a lengthy administrative record. Pruitt still hopes to rewrite them, but success would require the same kind of meticulous process.

“You can’t just govern by press release. You have to do the hard work of developing a rule that can withstand judicial scrutiny, even though it isn’t sexy,” says State Energy & Environmental Impact Center director David Hayes, an Interior Department official in the Clinton and Obama administrations. “Pruitt hasn’t been willing to do that, and that’s why he isn’t really having much of an impact.”

Green groups often tend to exaggerate Pruitt’s impact, emphasizing his hostility to air and water protections rather than his struggles in weakening those protections. Generally, a more formidable enemy makes for a more compelling fundraising appeal. But some environmentalists recognize and celebrate Pruitt’s struggles, and argue that his overreaching in defense of regulated industries has hurt his own cause. Environmental Defense Fund general counsel Vickie Patton says that Pruitt’s consistent “disdain for science and transparency” has given his opponents legal ammunition in court. Meanwhile, public polling suggests that Pruitt is even less popular than Trump, and only about one-third of Americans approve of the administration’s environmental policies, which has given his opponents political ammunition in Washington. That helps explain why Congress rejected Trump’s push to slash the EPA budget by a third, and why even the White House had to reject Pruitt’s plans for a public “red team/blue team” debate to try to discredit climate science.

“The silver lining with Pruitt is that his incompetence has helped mobilize a backlash against his agenda,” says Jeremy Symons, the Environmental Defense Fund’s vice president for political affairs. “We’re very optimistic that most of what he’s started won’t get finished.”

Pruitt’s critics point to the recent fuel-efficiency announcement as an example of his overrated reputation for wreaking havoc. He’s been criticizing the Obama gas-mileage rules ever since he took over the EPA, but all he did this week was initiate a bureaucratic process that could take years to complete before facing years of legal challenges. And the agency’s relatively brief supporting document for the move did not make much of a technical argument about why the Obama rules were excessively stringent, leaving a sense that EPA’s work has just begun.

“It took them more than a year just to do this, and it’s going to run into a wall of litigation, and then their rulemaking is going to run into a wall of litigation,” says energy attorney Ali Zaidi, who served as Obama’s associate budget director overseeing natural resources. “If they’re this carefree about the administrative record, they’re not going to get anything done.”

Dan Byers, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s vice president for policy, points out that Pruitt hasn’t had much help getting things done. Many EPA career staffers are less than enthusiastic about dismantling the work they’ve been doing for decades, and the Senate has been slow to confirm Pruitt’s political team. Trump’s nominee to be Pruitt’s deputy, a coal lobbyist, is finally expected to get a vote next week; the nominee to oversee EPA’s chemical safety division, a critic of chemical safety regulation, was forced to withdraw. Byers says Pruitt is making solid incremental changes—for example, by changing EPA’s “once-in-always-in” approach so that polluters will be able to stop using costly pollution controls once they reduce their pollution to legal levels, and by revising Obama-era orders that used an obscure rule limiting haze near national parks to crack down on coal plants in Arkansas, Texas and Utah. But Byers says it was always unrealistic to expect Pruitt to rewrite America’s regulatory rulebook in a year or even two.

“There’s a gap in the public understanding of these things,” Byers says. “The gears of government move a lot slower than people realize. But I’d say things are on schedule. You can’t just snap your fingers and do these big-ticket items overnight.”

The current question is whether Pruitt will hang around long enough to do those big-ticket items at all. Trump came to his defense this week after a visit to West Virginia coal country, where Pruitt is seen as a defender of jobs besieged by tree-hugging hippies and nit-picking bureaucrats. But the embarrassing new ethical revelations keep on coming—that his lobbyist landlords changed the locks after he overstayed his welcome, that he bought first-class tickets at taxpayer expense but traveled coach on his own dime, that he apparently lied when he said he didn’t know about generous pay raises for his close aides. If Pruitt is forced out, it’s not clear whether the Senate would confirm a similarly hard-charging advocate of industry.

Even if Pruitt stays, it’s not clear that he’ll succeed in rolling back rules, much less breathing new life into the coal industry. But he’ll still have the power to act through omission, to make change by not doing things another EPA leader might be inclined to do. There’s already evidence that he’s easing enforcement of existing environmental protections, and he certainly isn’t pushing for new protections. And the climate emergency is not going away just because the Trump administration has decided not to deal with it; even if Pruitt fails to create toothless carbon rules that provide lasting protection to the coal industry and other major contributors to global warming, he can protect the coal industry through inaction now.

“The vexing thing is that when you’re deal with public health and the climate, if you’re not moving forward, you’re falling behind, and Pruitt is adamantly refusing to move forward,” says Joe Goffman, a top official in the Obama EPA who now runs Harvard Law School’s environmental law program. “He isn’t changing the status quo as much as people think, but the status quo is a problem.”

Investors.com

<https://www.investors.com/politics/commentary/the-new-epa-and-why-the-radical-left-is-losing-it/>

The New EPA And Why The Radical Left Is Losing It (*Op-Ed)

By Steve Forbes, 4/6/18, 6:40 PM

It should come as no surprise how the man who is boldly redirecting the EPA — a once rogue agency that operated far beyond its constitutional authority — is now the subject of routine attacks from liberal news outlets and activists who want him fired. Scott Pruitt has taken his job as EPA Administrator seriously and has done more to reinstate the EPA's true, core mission than any of his modern-day predecessors.

Pruitt's sharp focus is correct — to restore contaminated lands, safeguard our nation's air and water, and do so by respecting real science rather than the ideologically driven fake science of his predecessors. He is demonstrating that we can both have a cleaner environment and greater economic growth and job creation. Contrary to the extreme environmentalist, prosperity and a safer environment can go hand-in-hand.

As Scott Pruitt observes, our nation can be, "pro-growth, pro-jobs and pro-environment."

He is absolutely correct.

In just over a year as EPA Administrator, Scott Pruitt has worked with the president to roll back dozens of needless regulations that will save America's manufacturing and energy sectors billions annually.

Most recently the Pruitt EPA announced how his agency will take much more realistic view of how the automobile industry can work with government regulators to reduce vehicle emissions. Liberals and green activists immediately cried foul — making chicken little claims of how the sky will immediately fall.

The truth is for many years EPA has issued regulations and mandates by bureaucrats who are completely ignorant of how real businesses and industry sectors operate or the compliance costs they already must endure. What's even more appalling is how these bureaucrats blatantly ignored or distorted inconvenient facts in conjuring up their suffocating, anti-growth decrees.

Shockingly, most government bureaucrats and liberal agency heads haven't even tried to seek input from the very people operating in the industry sectors they regulate. Scott Pruitt is eliminating the "silo" mentality at EPA and will seek an honest discussion with the people who operate our factories, power plants and heavy industry to find realistic, workable ways to protect our environment while allowing American industry to grow.

Another prime example of the need for decisive regulatory reform was the Obama-era EPA's carbon reduction plan, which was supposed to slow global warming but would have produced results at best infinitesimally small that they could not have been measured. Trump and Pruitt's actions to halt the Obama carbon plan saves the U.S. economy an estimated \$33 billion in un-necessary costs.

Pruitt correctly worked to put the brakes on a harmful plan that would have completely undermined American manufacturers and energy producers while giving foreign competitors another big advantage in the global marketplace.

Pruitt has made the EPA a far more effective, efficient agency by eliminating many unnecessary, bureaucratic backlogs. Pruitt's EPA has cut the amount of time it takes to review state water quality standards in half — from 120 days to 60 days. Pruitt's EPA has already committed some \$25 million in water infrastructure loans and has disbursed nearly \$9 billion in state funding to improve water quality. Flint Michigan for example, has received \$100 million for water infrastructure upgrades.

And the notion that enforcement under Scott Pruitt's EPA is lacking is just plain wrong. In fiscal 2017, EPA collected \$1.6 billion in administrative and civil judicial penalties. That figure is higher than any of the previous ten years of EPA enforcement operations, excluding fiscal 2016.

President Trump and Administrator Pruitt rightfully believe we can protect our environment without saddling American factories, manufacturing plants and energy operations with billions in unneeded regulatory costs while offering no way to measure any improvement to the environment or our quality of life.

By halting burdensome, often duplicative regulations, Pruitt's EPA can focus on measurable environmental protection, guided by peer-reviewed science without hurting consumers or Americans looking for skilled jobs in the energy or manufacturing sectors.

Perhaps the most important change of all, Pruitt's EPA is now operating under the proper rule of law and staying true to its mandate and defined authority by respecting facts rather than ideological fiction. The days of a rogue, agenda driven EPA are over. Pruitt is the right man for the job and it's no wonder the radical left is screaming for his ouster.

Politico

<https://www.politicopro.com/energy/whiteboard/2018/04/second-democratic-senator-backs-wheelers-epa-nomination-970800>

Second Democratic senator backs Wheeler's EPA nomination

By Anthony Adragna, 4/9/18, 12:00 PM

Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) will support Andrew Wheeler's nomination to be deputy administrator of the EPA, a spokesman confirmed today.

Manchin's support, coupled with the backing of Sen. Heidi Heitkamp (D-N.D.), likely ensures Wheeler has sufficient support to clear the closely-divided Senate. Republicans hold a 51-49 edge in the chamber, though Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) has been absent indefinitely as he battles brain cancer.

Wheeler, a fossil fuel lobbyist, is expected to get a cloture vote at some point this week in the Senate. The vote comes amid a torrent of ethical issues surrounding Administrator Scott Pruitt.

BNA

http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/display/no_alpha.adp?mode=si&frag_id=131340727&item=408&prod=deln&cat=AGENCY

Conservatives Ask Pruitt to Push Streamlined Environmental Permits

By Stephen Lee, 4/9/18

A coalition of conservative groups is calling on EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt to stick to the Trump administration's promise to streamline environmental permitting, and it's using Alaska's Pebble Mine as its poster child.

In July 2017, Pruitt said he would scrub an Obama-era plan to essentially block the proposed copper and gold mine because of the harm it would cause to water quality and the world's biggest wild salmon fishery. But Pruitt reversed that decision in January, saying the region's natural resources "deserve the utmost protection."

"If you can issue a pre-emptive veto for a mining project in Alaska, then you can veto any resource development project, whether it's a hydroelectric project in Washington state or Oregon, or a natural gas project in Oklahoma," Patrick Gleason, director of state affairs at Americans for Tax Reform, told Bloomberg Environment. "If the EPA has the

authority to pre-empt a project before it's had the opportunity to submit an application and have due process, then it can do that for any other state.”

In challenging other projects that need the Environmental Protection Agency's blessing, the coalition could use Pebble as an example of what it considers environmental permitting run amok, Myron Ebell, director of the Center for Energy & Environment at the Competitive Enterprise Institute in Washington, told Bloomberg Environment.

In addition to Americans for Tax Reform and the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the coalition includes Americans for Prosperity, American Conservative Union, and National Taxpayers Union. On March 23, the groups sent a [letter](#) to Pruitt saying the permit process “should not be a popularity contest determined by liberal environmental groups.”

But the coalition's letter—which was previously unreported, but obtained this week by Bloomberg Environment—misinterprets the law by claiming that the EPA exceeded its statutory authority, said Taryn Kiekow Heimer, who directs a campaign at the Natural Resources Defense Council opposing the Pebble Mine.

Moreover, the agency has proposed only “common-sense restrictions, not a veto,” on the size of the mine to protect the region's fish and aquatic resources, Kiekow Heimer said.

“EPA never said no to the Pebble Mine,” she told Bloomberg Environment.

The EPA didn't respond to an interview request from Bloomberg Environment.

One Agency, One Permit

To Ebell, who headed President Donald Trump's EPA transition team, the EPA's January decision to accept an Obama-era plan that pre-emptively blocked Pebble isn't consistent with the Trump administration's one-agency, one-permit approach.

The Trump approach forbids the EPA from vetoing permits that have yet to be issued under the Clean Water Act. Instead, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would be the sole agency responsible for both issuing and vetoing the permits.

“It seems to me that Pruitt needs to rethink what he did, because the administration's official position is to get rid of the veto entirely, not just the most outrageous forms of the veto,” Ebell said. “He needs to regularize that particular decision with what is now the proposed policy of the Trump administration. He needs to get his specific decision in line with the broader policy.”

‘Height of Hubris’

Kiekow Heimer also cast doubt on the coalition's request that Pruitt return to “fair and due process.”

“Pebble Mine is currently being fast-tracked through the permitting process despite overwhelming local and state opposition. Asking Pruitt to do even more to help Pebble is the height of hubris,” she said.

On April 9, the Army Corps will hold the first of nine public scoping meetings in Alaska. The meetings are meant to inform local residents about a pending study, known as an environmental impact statement, and to gather comments from the public about their concerns.

Pebble officials have [said](#) their mine plan is environmentally sound. The footprint of the planned mine takes up one-tenth of 1 percent of the Bristol Bay watershed, Mark Hamilton, Pebble's executive vice president for external affairs, told the Alaska House Resources Committee in February.

Daily Caller

<http://dailycaller.com/2018/04/06/dozens-of-epa-employees-caught-with-encrypted-apps-on-their-govt-phones/>

Dozens Of EPA Employees Caught With Encrypted Apps On Their Government Phones

By Michael Bastasch, 4/6/18, 11:53 PM

At least sixty EPA employees installed encrypted messaging applications on their government-issued phones and tablets in violation of agency rules, according to newly released documents.

EPA employs installed encrypted apps Signal and WhatsApp, as well as sixteen other messaging applications, on government cell phones, documents obtained by the Cause of Action Institute (COA) show.

Records show EPA employees also installed personal applications, including “email, sports betting, dating, and entertainment applications” that COA says “raise questions about the use of government-issued and taxpayer-funded mobile devices for personal purposes.”

“[I]t appears that most of these applications were never authorized for work-related business,” COA counsel Ryan Mulvey wrote. “To the extent they were used for personal purposes, the EPA should take its workforce to task for abusing the privilege of a government-furnished and taxpayer-funded phone.”

COA began its investigation in 2017 after Politico reported a small group of EPA employees were using the encrypted app Signal to strategize against the Trump administration. Employees reportedly wanted their conversations to be kept secret, sparking transparency concerns.

House Republicans demanded EPA’s Office of Inspector General (IG) investigate the matter and the the National Archives and Records Administration has an open investigation into potential mishandling of records.

EPA investigators did look into the matter and released their findings in a series of memos made public by COA as part of Freedom of Information Act requests and lawsuits. The IG found two EPA employees had Signal installed on their phones but determined they were not used to “purposefully circumvent the applicable Federal record retention rules.”

Those two employees, however, still violated EPA policy by downloading unapproved applications to government-issued devices, the IG claimed. Investigators also found fifty-eight other EPA employees had government phones with the encrypted messaging app WhatsApp.

Two officials admitted they used the app for “official EPA work,” but more than half of employees the IG’s office interviewed used the app for “the purpose of keeping in touch with family/friends domestically or overseas.”

COA also released a master list of all applications installed on EPA-issued mobile phones. The list indicates hundreds of personnel installed apps for weather, running, AirBnB, Amazon Alexa, games, news and traffic. Employees also installed personal email apps, like Yahoo and Gmail, which raise additional transparency concerns. Two EPA personnel had installed the dating app Tinder on their government devices.

“Whether these platforms were used for personal or work-related purposes, they are problematic and raise issues relating to federal records management,” Mulvey wrote.

“Why should a government employee be able to justify his installation of an unapproved, and legally problematic, application on agency-furnished hardware by claiming that he wanted to use it for personal purposes?” Mulvey added. “Should taxpayers pay for EPA employees to use government data plans to communicate with ‘family and friends?’”

http://esweb.bna.com/eslw/display/no_alpha.adp?mode=si&frag_id=131340740&item=408&prod=deln&cat=AGENCY

EPA Civil Rights Office Avoids Overhaul, but Must Be Timely

By David Schultz, 4/9/18

Environmentalists have long criticized the EPA's civil rights office as a black hole where complaints get submitted and then disappear.

But while a federal judge won't force the agency to fundamentally change the way this office does business, she ruled that the office must respond to civil rights complaints within 180 days. Critics have contended that the office allowed some complaints to linger since the 1990s.

Saundra Brown Armstrong, a judge in U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California, made the rulings March 30 in a major environmental justice case against the Environmental Protection Agency.

A more expansive ruling from the judge might have forced the agency to devote more staffing and resources to its civil rights office. However, Armstrong ruled that this is not something the law allows judges to force agencies to do.

Lingering Complaints

The lawsuit originated in long-dormant complaints to the EPA from several local activist groups across the country. The Sierra Club, one of the plaintiffs in the case, has received funding from Bloomberg Philanthropies, the charitable organization founded by Michael Bloomberg, the ultimate owner of Bloomberg Environment.

The groups said agencies in their respective states violated their civil rights by approving power plants, landfills, and other potentially hazardous facilities in predominately minority communities.

The EPA is responsible for investigating environmental justice complaints against states and other groups that receive federal funding.

Suzanne Novak—an attorney with Earthjustice, who represented the plaintiffs—said she was pleased with the ruling because it creates a rock-solid precedent that the EPA must adhere to the 180-day timeline for responding to these types of complaints.

“It keeps EPA's feet to the fire and forces them to enforce the law,” she told Bloomberg Environment.

EPA spokeswoman Enesta Jones told Bloomberg Environment that the agency wouldn't comment on litigation.

Narrow Ruling

However, Armstrong could have gone much further in her opinion. The only one of the plaintiffs' claims rejected by the judge, a George H.W. Bush appointee, argued that the EPA engaged in a “pattern and practice” of ignoring civil rights complaints.

A different ruling on this claim could have had sweeping effects on the way the agency responds to minority communities.

Novak said she and her attorneys were only looking for a ruling that helped their specific clients in this case, not to force the EPA to undergo a top-to-bottom reform of its civil rights office.

But Jeremy Orr, an attorney with the Detroit-based firm Pierson McNichols who specializes in environmental justice issues, said Armstrong's ruling was a missed opportunity for real change. He said that, without a court order, it's unlikely the civil rights office will improve its responsiveness any time soon.

“You know this administration is really going to use this to not make any changes,” Orr told Bloomberg Environment. “It's a ruling for the status quo.”

The case is Californians for Renewable Energy v. EPA, N.D. Cal., No. 4:15-cv-03292, 3/30/18.

The Hill

<http://thehill.com/opinion/energy-environment/381936-for-people-of-color-the-next-elections-could-mean-life-or-death>

For people of color, the next elections could mean life or death (*Op-Ed)

By Jason Nichols, 4/9/18, 12:30 PM

The Trump administration has been loosening EPA regulations, cutting and consolidating programs that engage in vital research on the environment and allowing dangerous practices that will have long-term consequences on the quality of our nation's land, air and waterways. The results of Scott Pruitt's tenure as Environmental Protection Agency director will be felt most intensely by people of color, adding to the laundry list of reasons black and brown people must vote in force to, respectively, disempower and remove this administration in 2018 and 2020.

A report from Pruitt's own agency confirms that people of color are "more likely to live near polluters and breathe polluted air." The study by the EPA's National Center for Environmental Assessment focused on microscopic airborne pollutants called "particulates." This microscopic dust and soot typically comes from "automobile fumes, smog, soot, ash and construction dust." Particulates are linked to asthma, heart attacks, low birth weights, hypertension and even premature death, all of which disproportionately affect African-Americans.

Infant mortality is twice as high for African-Americans as it is for whites, largely because of low birth weight and early birth. African-Americans are more likely to die after a first heart attack. Hypertension rates for African-Americans are "among the highest in the world" at around 40 percent. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, African-American children are 10 times more likely to die from asthma than non-Hispanic white children.

Trump selected Pruitt, a climate change denier, to head the agency he threatened to eliminate during his presidential campaign. Climate change not only exists, it's taking lives — and people of color fall victim to the effects of climate change, such as heat-related illness and death, and other health issues related to or exacerbated by environmental causes at higher rates than non-Hispanic whites. Here are a few examples.

In Baltimore, the talking heads on the nightly TV news love to cite the city's high homicide rate, particularly among African-American males, but they are conspicuously mum about the effects of climate change on the city. According to an MIT study in 2013, Baltimore has close to 800 deaths per year resulting from pollution, a number that far exceeds its record 2017 homicide rate. Despite scientifically backed claims that automobile fumes are killing people, Pruitt announced that the Environmental Protection Agency would reduce restrictions on vehicle emissions.

Pruitt's EPA also rejected a claim by the mostly poor African-American residents of Uniontown, Alabama, that a landfill with 4 million tons of coal ash could be responsible for some of the local residents' health problems. Uniontown sits only 30 miles from Selma, Alabama, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led marches in the face of state-sponsored brutality. However, now when the residents of the 88 percent African-American town get nosebleeds or pounding headaches, it isn't the result of a thrashing from a state trooper; they blame the landfill's toxins.

The EPA conducted no studies or formal inquiries into a potential connection between the coal ash and the residents' health claims, yet determined there was "insufficient evidence" that the existence of the landfill violated Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. Coal ash contains mercury, lead and arsenic, which can attack the nervous and reproductive systems of those who ingest it. The EPA itself says that living within a mile of coal ash can cause a one in 50 chance of developing cancer.

Latinos are more likely to work in industries where the Trump-Pruitt rollbacks will severely impact the quality of human health. For example, Pruitt recently denied a petition to ban chlorpyrifos, a pesticide that can cause brain damage in children. Mexican and Mexican-Americans are the most represented group among farm workers. According to a report on the Environmental Health of Latino Children, "Latino children are disproportionately affected by asthma and the adverse health outcomes associated with pesticide exposure."

The Pruitt-led EPA is another example of this administration's war on the most vulnerable members of our society. Its policies send a clear message to people of color: We don't care if you get cancer or have heart attacks, or if your babies die. Touting job growth, which started trending in the right direction toward the end of the Obama administration, will not mitigate the damage done to the health and wellbeing of people of color and poor people of all backgrounds.

The 2018 midterm elections — and certainly the 2020 presidential election — literally mean life and death for African-American and Latino families across the country. We need a climate change in Washington. The past 15 months of this administration have been far too stormy.

Jason Nichols is a full-time lecturer in the Department of African American Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. Follow him on Twitter @RealDocSoos.

Chicago Tribune

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/post-tribune/news/ct-ptb-east-chicago-epa-cleanup-st-0410-story.html>

EPA official: 'We're making headway' with East Chicago cleanup

By Craig Lyons, 4/9/18, 1:15 PM

Work cleaning up lead and arsenic contamination in East Chicago's Calumet neighborhood could wrap up this year in one part of the Superfund site but take longer in another residential area, officials said.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said during this year's construction season, contractors could complete remediating contaminated soil in East Calumet, but need another two to three years to finish work in the residential zone between Kennedy Avenue and McCook Avenue.

Albert Kelly, a senior advisory to EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, said Saturday the East Chicago cleanup is one of the agency's top priorities. Kelly said he understands that residents are frustrated and it doesn't look like the governmental entities are moving fast enough.

"Relationships are built one at a time. I believe that we're making headway every day we're out there," Kelly said. "We want to get these things cleaned. That's our commitment."

The idea is to make the community safe, Kelly said, but that takes time.

"We definitely want a permanent solution," Kelly said.

Sarah Rolfes, an EPA remedial project manager, said 323 properties still need remediation in Zone 2, and contractors could finish up to 140 homes this year. She said contractors remediated soil at 109 homes in Zone 2 in 2017.

Diana Adams, who lives in Zone 2, said she was told in 2016 her property needed remediation.

"The yard has not been done," Adams said. "Why should my property wait five years?"

Dan Haag, an EPA on-site coordinator, said the work done to date focused on priority properties, which included those with high levels of contamination, homes with young children or pregnant women or met other criteria. Haag said the EPA is still working with contractors to see what homes will be remediated this year.

"We're still working on that schedule," Haag said.

In Zone 3, Rolfes said contractors plan to remediate 111 homes, which would nearly complete soil removal efforts in the neighborhood. Contractors removed contaminated soil at 120 homes in 2017, Rolfes said.

"Those are the last remaining properties we have access to," Rolfes said.

Haag said the EPA still doesn't have access agreements to 40 properties in Zone 3.

The EPA is still working to get access to those properties, Rolfes said, and could add them to this year's list for remediation if that permission is given to them.

Region 5 Administrator Kathy Stepp said the team working in the Superfund site is doing its best to remedy the situation and get information to residents.

"I want you to feel good about the level of passion and commitment my team has," Stepp said.

AP

<https://apnews.com/46bb3a7e4ceb41d4ba74065c30c6c24d/Plan-says-Lake-Huron-in-'fair'-condition,-seeks-progress>

Plan says Lake Huron in 'fair' condition, seeks progress

4/7/18

CHICAGO (AP) — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has released a plan to tackle the most serious threats facing Lake Huron and the St. Marys River.

A report made public Friday by EPA's regional office in Chicago assesses the lake's ecosystem problems, sets research and monitoring priorities and outlines steps toward improvements.

It says Lake Huron is in "fair" condition overall. Among challenges are chemical contaminants, invasive species and nutrient pollution.

A partnership including government agencies and native tribes in the U.S. and Canada will work together toward solving the problems.

The report was developed under the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, which calls for the two nations to issue updated management plans for each of the lakes on five-year cycles.

More details are available through the EPA's website.

Wall Street Journal

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-looks-to-protect-domestic-car-makers-from-foreign-competition-1523037752?mod=searchresults&page=1&pos=2>

U.S. Looks to Protect Domestic Car Makers From Foreign Competition

By Timothy Puko, 4/6/18, 6:45 PM

The Trump administration is pursuing ways to protect domestic vehicle manufacturing by forcing imported cars to meet stricter environmental rules when entering the country, according to senior administration and industry officials, a move that would make imports more expensive.

The cost of meeting the stiffer import standards would, at least in part, be passed along to U.S. consumers. This style of “nontariff barrier”—a protectionist stratagem the U.S. has long condemned in other countries—is designed to reduce the relative cost of cars manufactured in the U.S., by American workers, the officials said.

President Donald Trump has asked the Environmental Protection Agency and several other agencies, including the Commerce and Transportation departments, to pursue plans to use such laws as the Clean Air Act to subject cars made overseas to strict emissions-standards testing and reviews when entering the U.S. The rules could effectively require more expensive technology on some foreign cars or subject those cars to more expensive hurdles that can be billed to the manufacturer or importer.

Either option would likely raise the costs for foreign cars sold in the U.S., making domestically produced cars cheaper by comparison. This effect of raising prices on consumers is common to most nontariff barriers, which seek to penalize imports through measures other than tariffs or duties.

The initiative remains in the planning stages and still faces hurdles to implementation. EPA officials are working now to craft a legal justification that would meet a high requirement of legal rationale, given any proposal is expected to draw lawsuits. Some in the administration see the idea as too radical, and the considerable legal challenges have already delayed the plan.

The White House didn’t respond to a request for comment.

Behind some of the administration’s thinking is a recent scandal at Volkswagen AG, which has 3.5% of the U.S. market. The German auto giant admitted to cheating on meeting standards limiting air pollution from tailpipes in vehicles with diesel engines. The EPA is exploring whether that scandal gives it legal justification under the Clean Air Act to set tougher rules, though it is also pursuing other alternatives that would have a broader impact.

“Reports that the president has requested input from his cabinet on possible nontariff barriers for vehicle imports to the U.S. is a bad idea and a pretext for protectionism,” said John Bozzella, head of Washington lobbying group Global Automakers and spokesman for Here for America, a coalition of companies including Volkswagen, BMW AG and Daimler AG’s Mercedes-Benz.

“It will increase prices for consumers and invite retaliatory actions by other countries,” Mr. Bozzella said. “It is ironic the United States now appears to be legitimizing nontariff barriers after working for decades to dismantle them when used by our trading partners. We ask the president to immediately reconsider this action.”

The EPA this week moved to ease emissions standards for vehicles sold in the U.S. spanning all auto makers, so any additional strictures for imported cars and trucks could put those manufacturers at a disadvantage. Volkswagen, for instance, has acknowledged using illegal software to cheat on government emissions tests in the U.S. in part because engineers couldn’t design diesel-powered vehicles to meet environmental standards. Apart from tougher regulations, stricter testing regimens, too, could financially pressure vehicle importers.

U.S. auto makers and industry lobbyists have complained they are blocked from foreign markets by nontariff barriers. The U.S. car industry claims foreign auto makers face few of these barriers when shipping to the U.S., with Japan and Korea among the biggest targets of these grievances.

If the U.S. responds with barriers of its own, it would provide an incentive to shift as much manufacturing as possible into the U.S. and drive employment—a strategy that has been successful in the past. After Washington and Tokyo feuded over trade in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Japanese car makers made a concerted effort to dramatically increase production in the U.S. and to hire American workers.

Today, Japan's three big auto makers— Honda Motor Co. , Toyota Motor Corp. and Nissan Motor Co. —run a combined 11 assembly plants in the U.S., the biggest chunk of the 18 foreign assembly plants supplying the American market. Volkswagen, Korea's Hyundai Motor Co. and Kia Motors Corp. and German luxury giants Daimler AG and BMW AG also operate U.S. factories. Combined with suppliers and dealerships, the number of Americans employed by the foreign automobile sector measures in the millions.

While the White House would like the plan to apply the standards to as many countries as possible, it isn't clear if it would affect cars produced in Canada and Mexico, because they are member countries of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement. U.S. manufacturers rely on Nafta factories to source nearly all the products sold at American dealerships. More than 75% of Detroit's sales are trucks or sport-utility vehicles, and those typically have been sourced to local plants.

Still, one of the biggest challenges for policy makers is how to differentiate between foreign and domestic cars. Auto manufacturing is a global industry, with companies often making and shipping parts across borders for assembly elsewhere.

Roughly three-quarters of the 17.1 million vehicles sold in the U.S. are built in Nafta factories, including those in the U.S.—11 million are assembled on U.S. soil. Of the remaining nearly four million shipped from outside North America, 1.7 million come from Japan, 820,000 are shipped from Korea and about a half-million are imported from Germany.

Ford Motor Co. , General Motors Co. and Fiat Chrysler Automobiles NV have been increasingly sourcing from markets outside Nafta—and those efforts could be affected by the administration's nontariff barriers. Ford, for instance, this year began shipping a compact SUV called the EcoSport from India and is expecting to sell significant volumes. That Follows Fiat Chrysler's move to ship the wildly popular Jeep Renegade—a small rough-and-tumble off-roader based on Fiat car designs—from Italy to the U.S.

The initial goal was to make a proposal as part of the agency's recently completed review of greenhouse-gas emissions standards for cars and light trucks for model years 2022-2025. That review led the EPA to propose lowering the standards set by the Obama administration last year, but no plans of tougher rules for foreign cars.

Reuters

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trade-autos/trump-administration-mulls-stiffer-rules-for-imported-cars-idUSKCN1HD2M8>

Trump administration mulls stiffer rules for imported cars

By David Shepardson and Steve Holland, 4/6/18, 2:41 PM

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Trump administration is considering ways to require imported automobiles to meet stricter environmental standards in order to protect U.S. carmakers, according to two sources familiar with the administration's thinking.

White House spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said President Donald Trump "will promote free, fair and reciprocal trade practices to grow the U.S. economy and continue to (bring) jobs and manufacturers back to the U.S."

Two U.S. automotive executives said Friday they believed the idea had been floated in White House talks last week by Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, but said the auto industry had not asked for the changes or backed them.

A Commerce Department spokesman referred a Reuters request for comment back to the White House, which has not responded.

U.S. automakers have long urged removal of non-tariff barriers in Japan, South Korea and other markets that they believe unfairly hinder U.S. exports. There are also concerns that any new non-tariff U.S. barriers could violate WTO rules.

The story was first reported Friday by the Wall Street Journal.

Citing unnamed senior administration and industry officials, the Journal said Trump had asked several agencies to pursue plans to use existing laws to subject foreign-made cars to stiff emission standards.

It appears such non-tariff barriers could have a greater potential effect proportionately on European automakers, which collectively import a greater percentage of cars from plants outside the United States, according to sales figures from Autodata.

In comparison, Japanese and Korean brands made about 70 percent of the vehicles they sold last year in the United States at North American plants. European brands built only 30 percent in North America.

Foreign automakers operate 17 assembly plants in the United States, 12 of which are owned by Asian manufacturers. Virtually all of those are non-union plants, many of them in southern states.

Imported vehicles accounted for about 21 percent of the 17.2 million sold last year in the United States, according to Autodata.

The White House initiative was still in the planning stage, with officials at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency working to craft a legal justification for the policy, the paper said.

The EPA and the Commerce Department, which the newspaper said was also involved in the effort, did not immediately respond to requests for comment from Reuters. Neither did representatives for Ford Motor Co and General Motors, nor for the United Auto Workers union, which represents workers at those automakers.